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2 Aug. 2007
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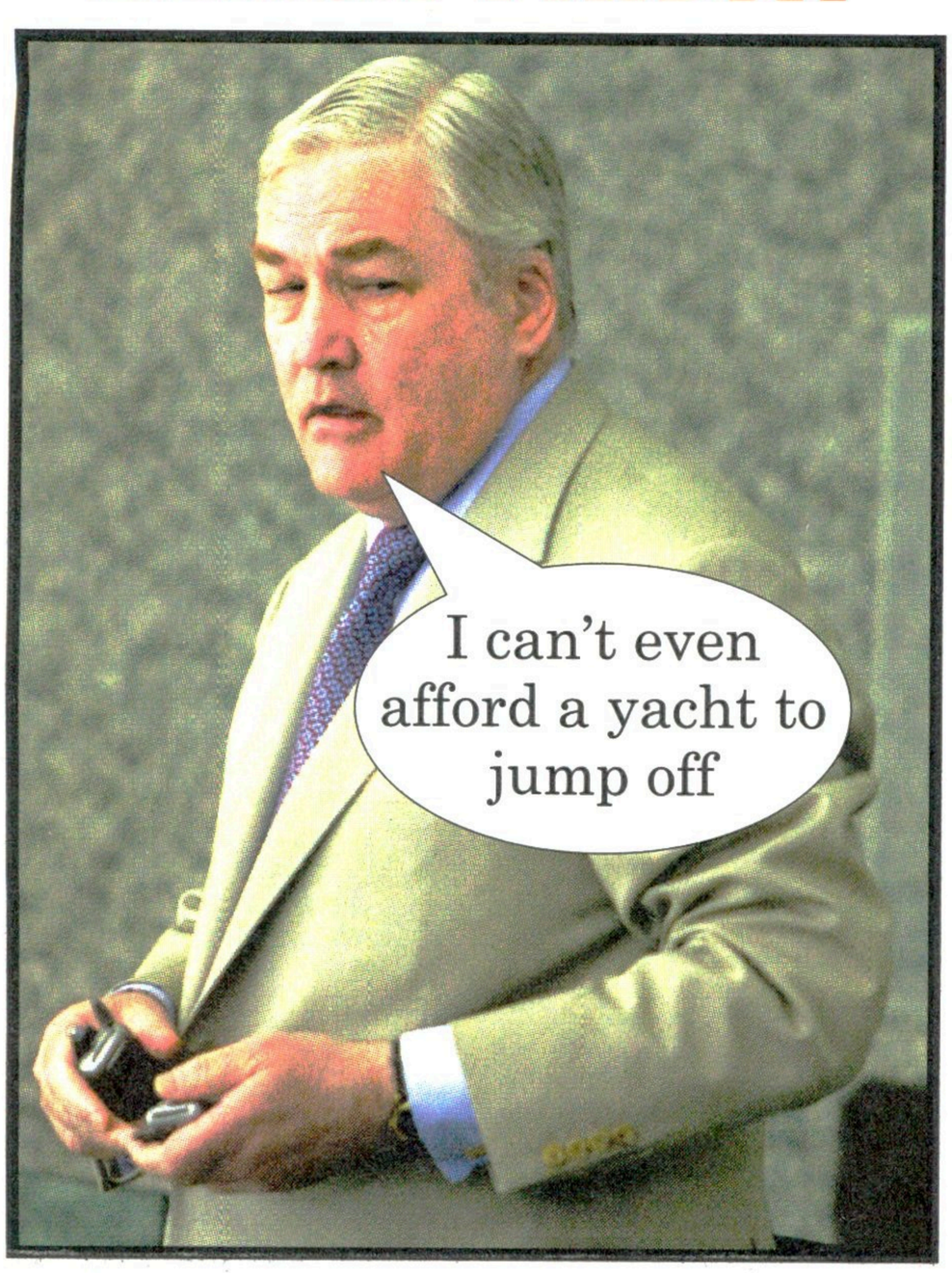
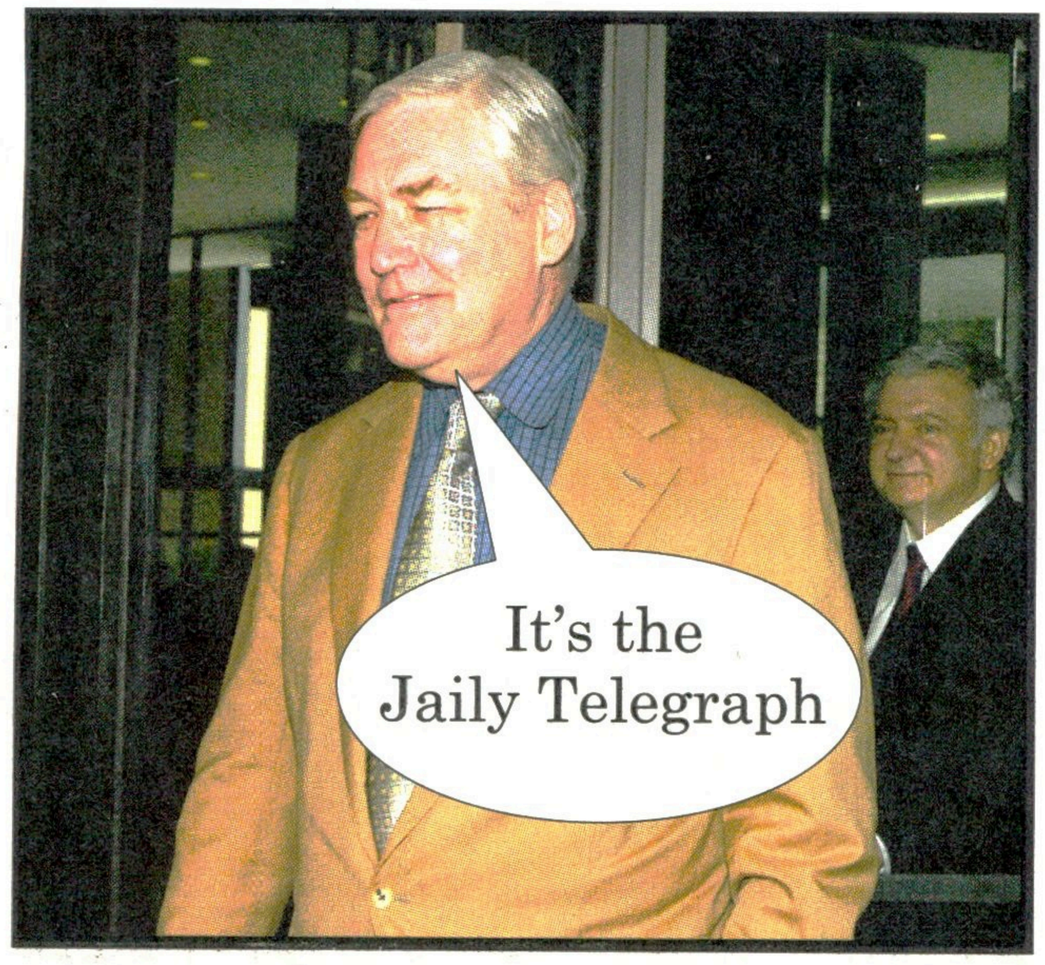
BLACK FRIDAY

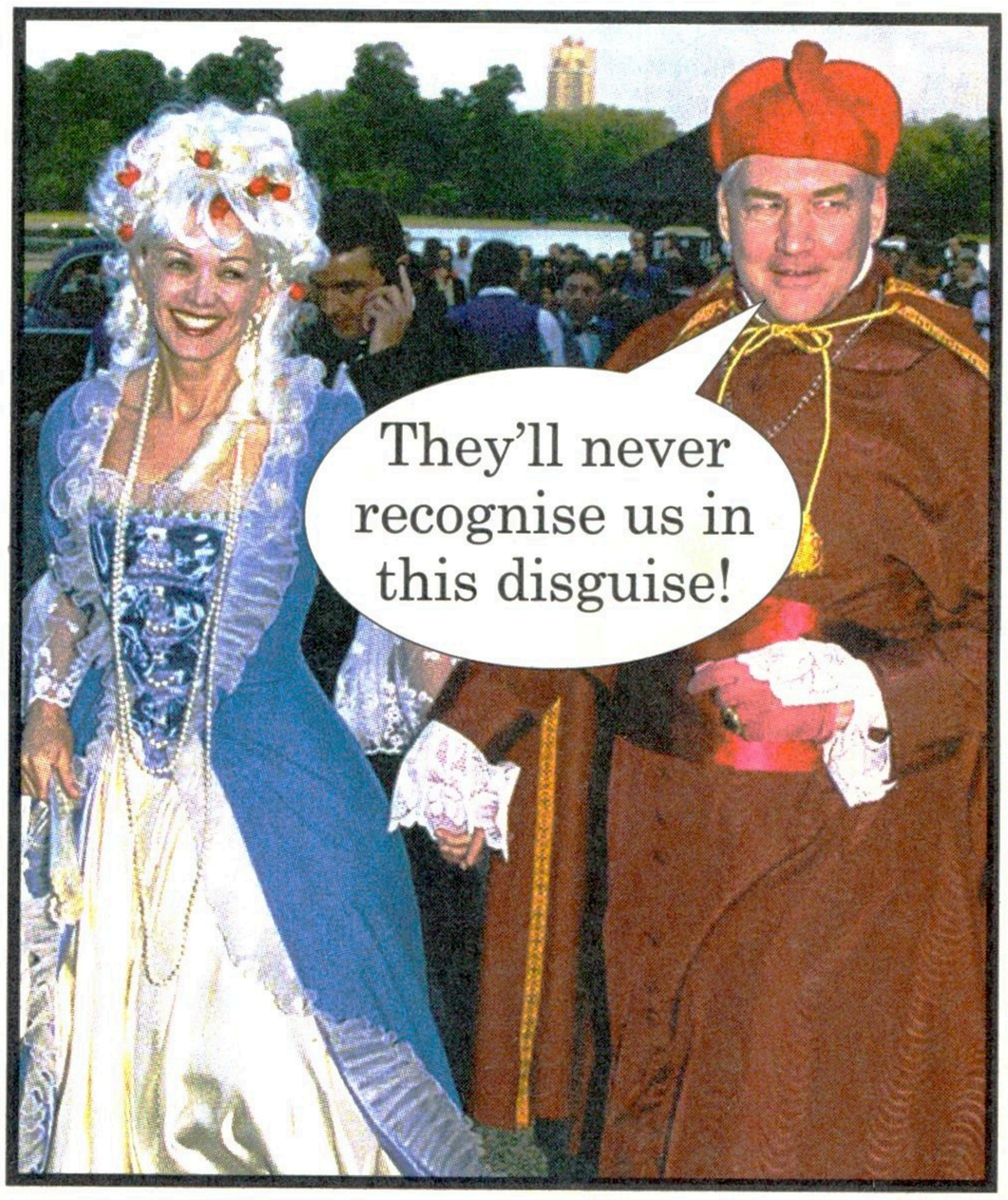


CONMAN BLACK

BLACK TO LAUNCH NEW PAPER



BLACK'S DRAMATIC ESCAPE



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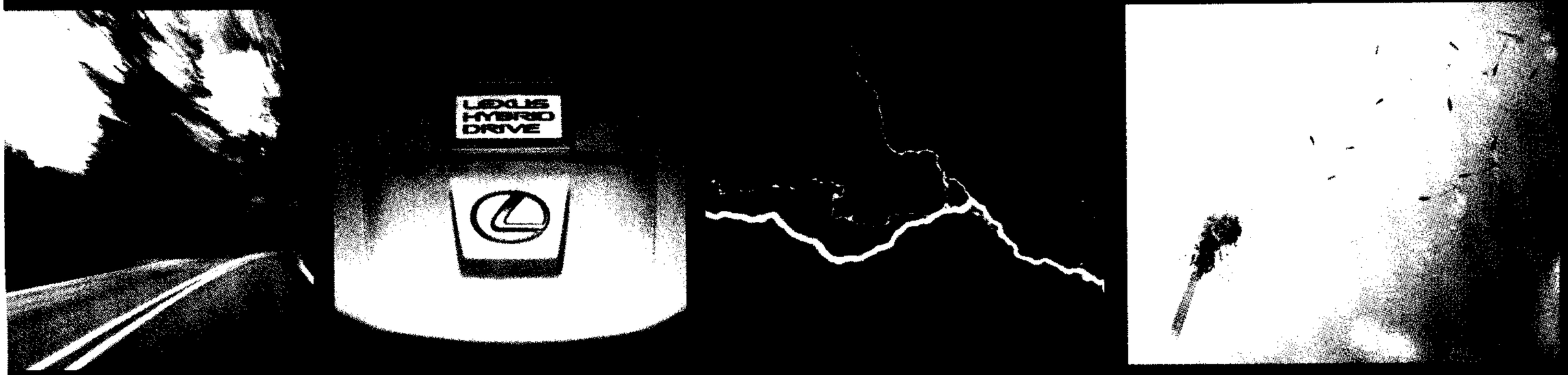

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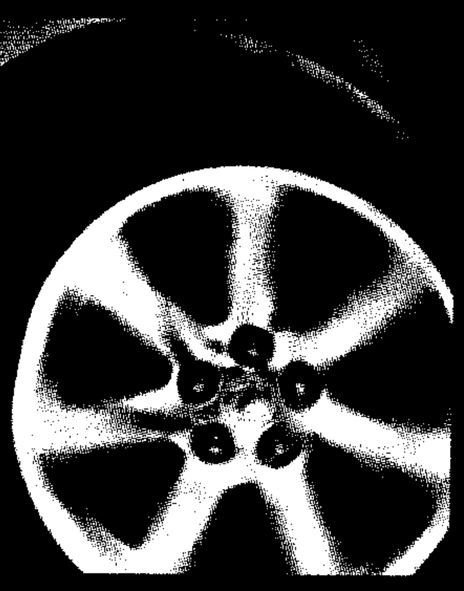
PERFORMANCE.*



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End of the peer humour

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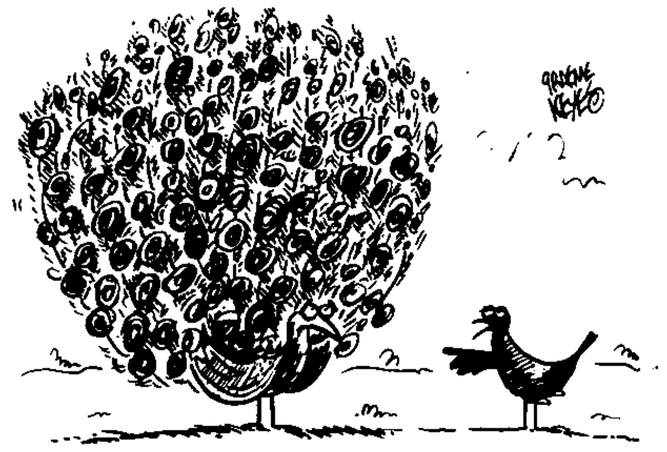


"Look pal, that kind of ostentation was all very well in the Blair years but this is the Brown era!"

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

WHERE are Britain's diplomats and terror experts going to learn the language skills they need now that the Foreign Office has decided to close its language school because it is not "commercially viable"?

The FCO school provides specialised lessons in 41 languages to diplomats, MPs and many top public servants, including anti-terror specialists. It was set up around 20 years ago after the foreign affairs select committee found that the standard of languages at the FCO was inadequate.

A review of the service last year did not recommend closure of the school, but the department now claims that will save £1.5m a year and that language training can be provided privately. Permanent secretary Sir Peter Ricketts told the current Commons committee: "It would be better use of public money to outsource the language teaching requirement."

Public service union Prospect, which says 104 jobs will go, does not believe the "highly specialised" training will be easy to find at other language schools.

Controversially, several universities have closed language departments in recent years. When Durham announced closure of its East Asian Studies department in 2003, an important source of Chinese and Japanese speakers for the Foreign Office, Tony Blair even wrote to the university asking it to reconsider.

Meanwhile, the Home Office continues to boast that it is "protecting the UK from the threat of terrorism" with big funding increases to police and emergency services, and the government's estimate of the cost of introducing ID cards stands at more than £5bn. Surely £1.5m a year to ensure that diplomats and anti-terror experts have the language skills they need is money well spent?

"Try being dour and boring"

PFI

IN HIS last budget Gordon Brown cleverly tied his successor into selling £36bn worth of public assets, much of which will be rented back under PFI schemes (see Eye 1181).

The move followed a report from favoured Brown adviser and now BBC Trust chairman Sir Michael Lyons in which the sell-off of the Department of Work and Pensions' estate, known as the PRIME contract, was held up as a "model for outsourcing estate management".

Under that deal, Land Securities Trillium bought the entire DWP estate, including Job Centres, for £455m in return for managing and leasing them back to the government for 20 years at a then estimated cost of £9.7bn. Official Treasury figures now put the total at £11.4bn, a £1.7bn increase in a matter of months. But is the deal better value than the alternative of public ownership, the only official reason for which a PFI contract should go ahead?

The Eye asked for the basic value-for-money calculation (which must have been made in order to justify the deal) under the Freedom of Information Act. After several months and a bollocking from the information commissioner, DWP's response showed just how out of control PFI now is.

"The specific information you requested cannot be identified from the file titles and detailed perusal of the contents would, we estimate, will [sic] take 100 days to complete," came the reply. "The estimated cost of providing the information is £17,500 plus a potential cost of professional assistance should this be required…"

In other words, the justification for spending £11.4bn of taxpayers' money (and counting) has been lost. Some "model for outsourcing estate management".

ANOTHER PFI project that has taxpayers over a barrel is the Ministry of Defence's £2bn deal to re-develop and run the Colchester garrison for 35 years.

To sweeten the deal and get it "off balance sheet" the PFI company – backed by Atkins, McAlpine and HSBC – was given a 150-year lease on the land. So after 35 years the taxpayer doesn't get its land back but will have to beg for a renewal of the contract or take up an option to buy out the lease.

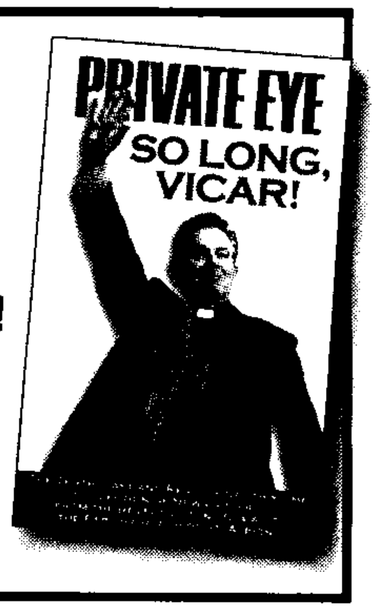
How much will that cost? The MoD won't say as it's "commercially confidential". But a spokeswoman insisted the sum "was considered to represent value for money". So that's all right then.

"NEW" Labour's even-newer generation showed appropriate respect for their elders and betters at the Young Fabian Society pub quiz last week, held at the Barley Mow in Westminster.

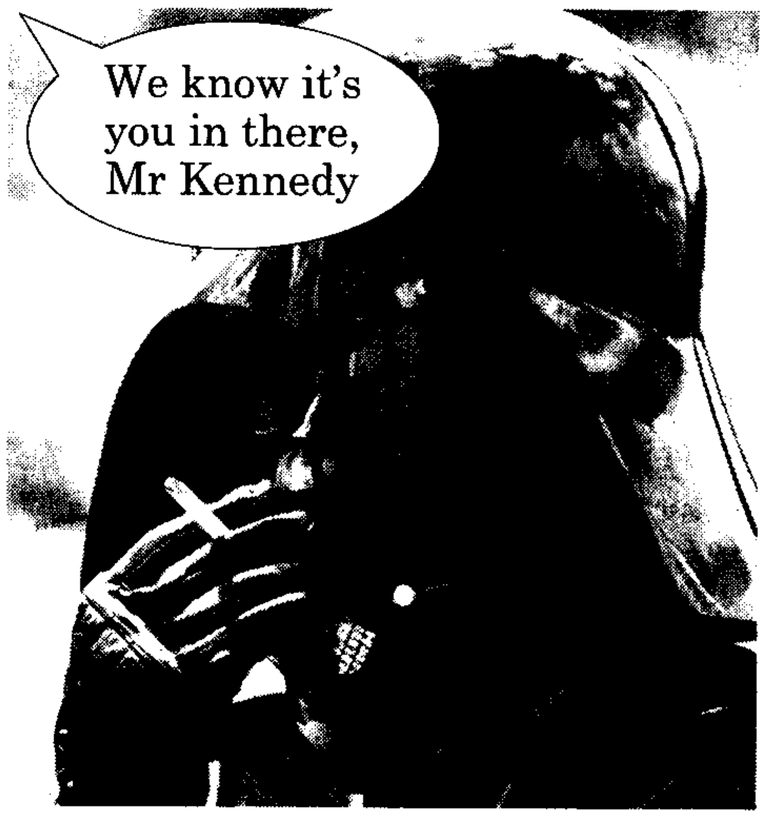
One question – "What do the Leader of the Commons, the Minister for Women and the Labour Party Chair all have in common" – clearly demanded the answer, "Harriet Harman". And not, provoking gales of laughter, "They're all shit!"

Forget the Alastair Campbell Diaries – THIS is the inside story!

The final ST ALBION PARISH NEWS – So Long, Vicar! Available exclusively from Private Eye. See pages 33 and 35.



POLICE PURSUE LIB DEM



JUST FANCY THAT!

"The Queen burst into giggles during a *Vanity Fair* magazine shoot. Her Majesty's usually stern appearance for portraits cracked when the shoot's director played up the part of a fashion snapper telling The Queen she was just 'fabulous'. Cheeky style director Michael Roberts even told The Queen to toss off her tiara during the shoot at Buckingham Palace. A *Vanity Fair* spokesman said: 'Roberts got the Queen to giggle after suggesting that she take off her tiara,'… The laughter helped break the ice for the pictures taken by celebrity photographer Annie Leibovitz."

– Sun *online, 4 May 2007*

"The Queen threw a wobbler during the filming of a documentary – when a photographer told her to take off her crown. Her Majesty posed in full Royal regalia for celebrity snapper Annie Leibovitz as BBC cameras rolled… But when Annie suggested the crown looked 'too dressy,' the Queen glared and stormed out, barking, 'I'm not changing anything'"

– Sun *front page, 12 July 2007*

EDITORIAL
6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN.
Tel: 020 7437 4017. Fax: 020 7437 0705.
Email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk
Website: www.private-eye.co.uk

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ABC

Street Of Shame

GOOD to see that as £37m budget cuts and redundancies bite at the *Sun*, everyone is still toeing the Murdoch line on trade unions.

"Our assistant manager makes everyone's life hell," a bullied worker sobbed to the paper's agony aunt "Dear" Deidre Sanders recently. "He bullies and manipulates people. He has staff in tears… We are not part of a union so we feel we have nowhere to go."

How did Sanders, more used dealing with three-in-a-bed romps and floppy hubbies, respond to this heartfelt plea? "You don't need a union to stand up for yourselves… The National Bullying Helpline can help."

POLLY TOYNBEE was in fine rant mode when writing in the *Guardian* about how much the media played down last month's fatal floods across much of the north of England.

"This disaster has had low key coverage, though it is far worse than foot and mouth in its effects," she argued. "Imagine if the Thames had burst its banks at Westminster, Chelsea and Fulham. It wouldn't have been a weather story but a full-scale national emergency."

Perhaps Polly was too busy to watch BBC, ITV and Sky, all of which led repeatedly on the floods. But surely she should have noticed that the only national newspaper *not* to have "splashed" the story on its front page – with the inevitable exception of the *Daily Big Brother* aka *Star* – was in fact her beloved *Guardian*.

HOW did the *Di-ly Express* react to the news that its much-desired courtroom confrontation between Mohamed Fayed's legal team and the Duke of Edinburgh would not, after all, be happening, thanks to the spoil-sport coroner in charge of the inquest into the death of Princess Diana?

Er, by all but ignoring it and choosing to concentrate instead on what a front page headline called "DIANA'S FEAR OF MURDER: Her ten-page letter claiming Charles was planning car crash".

The letter in question? Yep. The same one that Paul Burrell told the *Daily Mirror* about way back in… October 2003!

FURIOUS at David Cameron's decision to appoint a Muslim woman to the shadow cabinet, the *Mail*'s own Glenda Slagg, Amanda Platell, wrote a furious denunciation of the Tory leader.

"Cameron's only concern was PR." cried Aussie Amanda. "It's enough to make you want to change parties."

It is, perhaps, worth recalling that in Tony Blair's first term, the press secretary of then Tory leader William Hague told Conservative MPs such as Nicholas Soames that they could no longer wear pinstriped suits. The reason? "Men in pinstripes look terrible on TV and send out completely the wrong message."

And who was this image-obsessed apparatchik? Amanda Platell!

"LUCY's killer cracked after moving back near school he hated," revealed the *Evening Standard* on 13 July. It referred to the case of psychotic Old Harrovian druggie William Jaggs, who murdered the daughter of a Harrow schoolmaster.

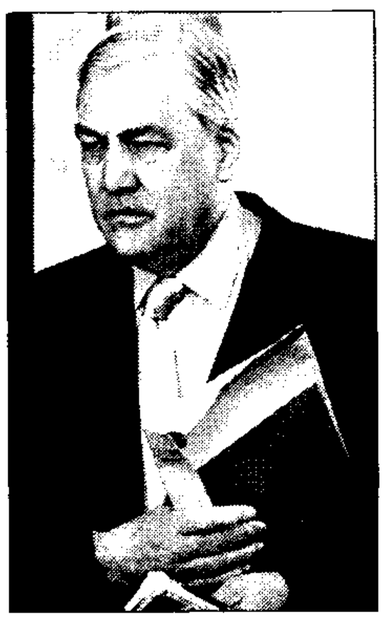
How did the *Standard* get this scoop from "close friend" Matthew Bell, which left the rest of Fleet Street in the starting gates? Could he by any chance be the same Matthew Bell who was recently taken on as a hack on the paper's Londoner's Diary?

CONRAD BLACKWATCH

The Crook, The Diarist, The Biographer and His Wife

SOMEWHAT eccentrically, the *Independent* marked Conrad Black's conviction by attacking his hostile biographer, Tom Bower. Media diarist Guy Adams devoted much of his column on Monday to the "cosy professional relationship" between Bower and his wife, the *Evening Standard*'s editor, Veronica Wadley.

"Bower, you see, spent most of Black's 14-week-long trial at the sumptuous Peninsula Hotel in Chicago, where he was billeted by the *Evening Standard* to cover courtroom proceedings in exchange for a munificent weekly fee, plus expenses," Adams wrote.



"No one would accuse the Bower-Wadley family of abusing company funds in the illegal manner of Lord Black… But Bower's relationship with his wife's payroll does at least raise issues of pots and kettles. Perhaps it should also give the many shareholders who own a slice of the *Evening Standard* some pause for thought."

Alas! Had Adams given himself pause for a quick phone call, he'd have learned that during all Bower's trips to Chicago for the trial the *Standard* didn't contribute one cent to his expenses, whether for jetting over there or staying at the sumptuous Peninsula Hotel. All he received was a fee for his articles. And to avoid charges of uxorious favouritism, Wadley paid him *less* than the usual *Standard* rate.

The only paper to defray any of his costs was actually the *Sunday Times*, which paid the air fare for Bower's last trip to cover the verdict plus £200 towards phone bills. Because of his contract with the *Sunday Times* Bower had to decline an offer that arrived in the first week of July begging him to write a piece about the end of the trial. It was from, er, the *Indie*. Might that rejection by any chance be related to this week's diatribe?

The Black Arts

"My experience with journalists," Conrad Black once wrote, "authorises me to record that a very large number of them are ignorant, lazy, opinionated, intellectually dishonest and inadequately supervised." Many hacks who have written about his trial in the past couple of months amply confirmed the accuracy of this description. But he could hardly complain, since the main beneficiary of their ignorance and idleness was Black himself.

The most flagrantly unbalanced coverage was in the Canadian media, which dispatched a posse of Conrad's friends and groupies to Chicago – including Peter Worthington of the *Toronto Sun* ("It looks good for Conrad"), Christy Blatchford of the *Globe & Mail* and high-kicking cheerleader Mark Steyn, whose effusions were so prolific that his employers at *Macleans* magazine set up a special blog to accommodate them. All kept insisting that their hero (and former benefactor) was wholly innocent. Meanwhile, pro-Black lawyer Steven Skurka produced daily commentaries for Canadian TV, all predicting that Black would be acquitted.

This background noise had its effect. A few weeks ago Rupert Murdoch told a friend that he thought Black would get off. Why? Er, Mark Steyn had told him so when they met at a neocon get-together. Henry Kissinger was similarly persuaded by Steyn.

Eventually the British press succumbed to the spin. The first suggestion that Conrad might walk came in the *FT* on 3 May. "Glimmer of optimism in Black camp as prosecution case falters," reported Stephanie Kirchgaessner, whose coverage earned her much flattery from Black when they met in the courtroom.

Before long this was the received wisdom. "It wasn't supposed to be like this," chortled Dominic Lawson, recently named by Black as one of his three remaining friends in Britain, in his *Independent* column on 8 May. "The past seven weeks have been a grievous disappointment to those salivating at the prospect of the peer in prison pyjamas."

"The great risk of kicking a man when he's down is that one day he will get back up and kick you right back," wrote another loyal former Black employee, Philip Delves-Broughton, in the online magazine *First Post* on 17 May. "After the past few days of Conrad Black's trial in Chicago, it would be no surprise if his more excitable critics were not suddenly having nightmares… In a matter of days, Black's chances of walking free from court have gone from negligible to reasonable."

"Conrad might just walk," Stephen Glover echoed in his *Independent* column on 18 June, though he warned that "much will depend on the judge's summing-up" – thus proving yet again Black's point about the danger of inadequately supervised hacks. If Glover had been paying attention, he'd have realised the judge wasn't going to deliver a summing-up.

Still, the opinion of experts such as Mark Steyn and Dominic Lawson was enough to convince *Indie* editor Simon Kelner. Guests at a London party on 29 May watched Kelner gleefully haranguing Tom Bower, the biographer whom Black had threatened to sue when he was acquitted. "Conrad's getting off!" yelled the *Indie* supremo. "You're going to be humiliated!"

Shome mishtake, shurely?

The Things They Say

"The rough facts are that I am an honest businessman; the chances of my committing an illegality are less than zero, this will be clear when my accusers have to prove beyond a reasonable doubt the guilt of innocent people and not just manipulate the agencies of the US and Canadian governments to act on the pre-emptive presumption of guilt and conduct a prolonged assassination of careers and reputations… We will bring this entire, gigantic, malicious persecution down around the ears of its authors." – *Email from Lord Black of Crossharbour to biographer Tom Bower, April 2006.*

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

"The conversations celebrities had with us often bore absolutely no relation to the words which were printed in the column. On the odd occasion I didn't even know the quotes had been rewritten until I read the paper the following day… There was re-jigging and there was making up entire chats. Amazingly we were never sued for having imaginary conversations."

– Jessica Callan, former "3am girl", on life at Piers Morgan's Mirror *(where her copy was edited by Richard Wallace, the current editor)*

"There's an excellent piece in here about the Guardian's mindless obsession with celebrity culture"

"You only have to acknowledge your inner child. You don't have to dress up in his clothes"

RUMOUR *has it that Times* editor Robert Thomson is being lined up to take the helm of the *Wall Street Journal* when the Dirty Digger buys the paper. Though Thomson denies it, he is certainly doing his best to help the deal go through.

He recently sent a letter to Jim Ottaway, who controls a large block of shares in the *WSJ*'s parent company, Dow Jones, and who is resisting the Murdoch bid because he fears the newspaper's coverage of China will be jeopardised by the Digger's kowtowing to Beijing.

"I was somewhat disconcerted to read your thoughts about News Corp's coverage of China and the world in general," Thomson wrote, "which were clearly a challenge to the integrity of the journalists at *The Times* and to me personally. As a Beijing correspondent, I was in Tiananmen Square on the night of the massacre in 1989 and was thrown out of Tibet by heavy-handed Chinese officials, so the explicit allegation that we are pandering to the Communist Party came as rather a surprise."

This is somewhat disingenuous. Thomson was indeed a Beijing correspondent in 1989, but not for Rupert Murdoch. He worked for the Melbourne *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* (both owned by Fairfax) and the *Financial Times*. And what about being "thrown out of Tibet"? True enough: he was in a posse of correspondents from Hong Kong and China who snuck into Tibet and were then turfed out for being there illegally. But, once again, this was long before he joined the Murdoch empire – and before he married the daughter of a general from the People's Liberation Army in a splendid ceremony at Beijing's Summer Palace. Yet he implies that it was his fearless reporting for the *Times* which had him evicted.

Jim Ottaway seems unmoved by Thomson's protestations. "Unfortunately, Mr Murdoch does not agree with you on this critical issue of business and news integrity for viewers in China of his Star TV," he replies, referring to the ditching of BBC World from Rupert's Star TV satellite service after Chinese leaders objected to its coverage of human rights in China. "He proved that again when he ordered his HarperCollins book publisher to kill a memoir by Chris Patten, former governor of Hong Kong, critical of Chinese government interference there… These triumphs of business, personal and political interest over honest and accurate news reporting are a recurring theme in the Murdoch publishing philosophy and history."

Oh dear. But full marks to Thomson for trying. As further proof of his devotion to duty, the *Times* was the only "broadsheet" not to report the news that the Competition Commission has widened its inquiry into Sky's acquisition of an 18 percent stake in ITV and will now examine the influence of Rupert Murdoch's entire business empire, including its newspapers, on the UK media landscape. Such loyalty to the Digger surely deserves a reward – if not the *Wall Street Journal* editorship, then at least a generous pay-rise.

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Cambrian News

DUMMY MUMMY

Lowri Turner

THE outpourings of newspaper columnist and TV airhead Lowri Turner have set new records on the Polly Filler scale over the last fortnight. In long features for both the *Grauniad* and the *Daily Mail* she has shared with readers her annoyance that her new baby daughter, Ariel, is "non-white". It's all the father's fault: he's Indian.

Despite conceding that "my daughter should not be defined by her colour", she then proceeded to do just that. Lowri has found herself examining the baby "for signs that her skin is becoming a deeper shade of brown and being perturbed if I find them… Part of the grief I am going through with my daughter is the loss of the possibility that she will look like me… I look at my baby and wonder if people will look at her and assume that I am not her mother."

In a rare moment of self-awareness, Turner added: "I realise that this is a deeply shallow and vain thing to say." But not as vain as what came next: "There is also an inescapable issue of status." A white woman who gives birth to a non-white child "is stereotyped as a Vicky Pollard figure… Am I one of these women now? Apparently, yes – particularly since I am now a single parent, having split up from my daughter's father."

Old habits die hard for Turner, it seems. A few years ago she dumped her previous husband, former *Sunday Mirror* editor Paul Connew, a month before the birth of their second son. Connew had given up his career to look after their eldest child so she could pursue her media ambitions – only to find himself then given the heave-ho when she decided she was no longer satisfied with being the main breadwinner. In her columns, however, she blamed his "career-obsessed" attitude for the break-up.

Last year she married computer expert Nicol Batra, whom she proudly referred to in print as her toyboy. "Without wishing to be rude to my first husband, the father of my children," she informed readers last July, "I will say that my choice of husband number two was informed by my experience of being married to the first, an archetypal Alpha Male." But by the time the latest baby was born, in April, she had already parted from Batra – a fact she omitted to mention in her columns about the birth. Now she faces a legal tussle as he seeks to gain regular access to his child, just as Connew did before him.

Still, no doubt it'll give her plenty to write about. In Lowri's world, everything is grist to the journalistic mill. Immediately after her daughter's arrival she used yet another of her regular columns, for the *Western Mail*, to reveal that "post-birth, I have stitches, piles, eye bags that are pleated… My bosoms are now so huge and boulder-like I have to wear a bra in the bath." (She also boasted that the baby was named Ariel "after the Shakespearean character in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*", blissfully unaware that Ariel actually appears in *The Tempest*.) As she explained when exploding last week's bombshell: "I have split with my husband. There is no other way to write this and, if I didn't have this column I wouldn't be writing it at all." Er, quite. Isn't it time her editors relieved poor Lowri of this onerous burden?

"What an extraordinary rendition"

MARK ANSTEAD, a property hack for the *Mail on Sunday*, has sent a desperate cry for help to fashion and showbiz PRs.

"I'll keep this short and sweet – are you working with a famous name or well-known face who happens to be thinking (even if only maybe, possibly) of selling a home?" he pleads.

"It needn't be the main home, it could be a second or holiday home? If so I can probably arrange a double-page spread interview in *Mail on Sunday Property*, increasingly seen as a useful way to achieve a prominent profile feature… Plenty of space is given to describing the subject and what they are currently up to, so we can easily bring in important publicity plugs."

Who could resist? But Anstead realises some celebs are nervous about being interviewed at home, so he hastens to add that he is "more than happy" to ease their worries by being vague about the location – "or even lying".

MEANWHILE the *Daily Mail*'s "brilliant" new recruit Bel Mooney is repeatedly billed as an "advice writer" or "inspiring advice columnist" or variations thereof.

Why not "agony aunt"? That, after all, is the nature of the weekly stuff she is pumping out for the *Mail*.

Bonkers Bel has forced *Mail* editor Paul Dacre to agree that she will never be referred to as an agony aunt. She apparently thinks it is "demeaning".

"THE Forest Gate terror raid grows murkier by the day," declared a *News of the World* editorial column on 30 July 2006, nearly two months after police had admitted that despite kicking down the doors of two houses in East London and shooting one of the occupants, Mohammed Abdul Kahar, they had no evidence to connect either him or his brother Abul Koyair to terrorism.

"True, despite the suspicions of the police, no chemical bomb was found. But many other urgent questions remain unanswered. The latest is just exactly why was a stash of vile child porn images on the computer seized at the family home? Meanwhile, the brothers, plus their extended family, are slumming it at taxpayer's expense, in a four-star hotel with swimming pool and spa… As they bask in a life of luxury, don't the Forest Gate Two also have much to explain?"

Er, no, came the discreet answer on Sunday 8 July this year, tucked away in a small apology on page 2.

"We incorrectly implied that Abul Koyair had criminal convictions, that their parents had planned to go on holiday despite the shooting, that there was strong evidence to support charges after pornography had been found on a second-hand computer belonging to Abdul Kahar and that he refused to reveal to police where a large sum in cash, found at home, had come from. In fact, no charges were brought over the computer, police were immediately informed of the cash savings and we accept that the brothers are not involved in terrorism. We apologise for the embarrassment caused."

With that cleared up (a mere eight months after police announced the same thing), the man responsible for the editorial – former editor Andy Coulson – was free to start his new job the next day for the Conservative Party, spinning the "historic" appointment of Muslim Sayeeda Warsi as shadow minister for community cohesion.

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Label on toy football

GORDON BROWN may have escaped the Treasury, but he has left behind a massive and chaotic problem in his flawed tax credit scheme. Last week it was slated by the National Audit Office and opposition spokesman for losing £9.6bn to fraud and errors – more than twice the amount of any other benefit scheme.

While crooks have managed to milk the system illegally at an unprecedented rate, some genuine hard working families are still struggling to get any kind of payment from HM Revenue and Customs.

Single mother Linda Austwick is one. She has been trying since April to get tax credits to supplement the £150 a week she earns working in her local Lancaster newsagent's but has been told only that her case is "stuck in a queue".

In the meantime, because she has fallen behind with her rent, she and her 17-year-old son are being threatened with eviction by her landlord. In addition, her utility bills are "just piling up".

"Once when I rang the 'help'-line to say I was being evicted, I was told I shouldn't be depending upon tax credit to pay the rent. I asked what else I should use," she told the Eye.

She said that she had been told she did not qualify for an emergency payment because she was working. Now she turned to her MP, Geraldine Smith, who has agreed to intervene on her behalf. But after day upon day of her own fruitless phone calls, she is not holding her breath.

REGULAR *Eye* readers may have been alarmed at Shriti Vadera's ministerial appointment at the Department for International Development (DfID). The former UBS Warburg banker and long-time adviser to Gordon Brown has been involved in some of our least successful privatisations – from the British Rail sell-off to the Tube's PPP.

Though Vadera is a junior minister working under Douglas Alexander, the *Eye* has seen an internal DfID briefing that makes clear Vadera's role will be greater than her rank suggests. The memo explains that in addition to being Development Secretary, Alexander will have a role helping Brown get re-elected – leaving the well-connected Vadera to take up the slack.

EVEN the hardest hearts must feel for poor George Galloway [*not really* – Ed]. Not only is he bracing himself for a possible Commons expulsion over Sir Philip Mawer's probably damning report into his links with Saddam Hussein's regime (he denies any wrongdoing), but it seems his Respect party is facing a mid-life crisis.

Nationally the party is haemorrhaging members and failed to make any real impact at council elections in May. Now, two of the dozen "Bengali tigers" elected to the London borough of Tower Hamlets council in May last year (led by Abjol Miah, recently fingered in Ed Husain's *The Islamist* as one of the more extreme members of East London Mosque in the 1990s) have just jumped ship – and more may follow.

Respeck councillor Waiseul Islam switched to Labour in May, eight weeks after comrades laughed down his dream of becoming Respect's first Bengali MP. And this month Shamim Chowdury quit as a councillor, saying he was fed-up with Respect's "mindless, immature and self-serving" SWP-dominated leadership.

CALLED TO ORDURE

SOME Labour MPs just hate the armed forces' top brass.

They did not like the independence of mind shown by Admiral Sir Mike Boyce, who was chief of the defence staff when the Iraq war started. Boyce repeatedly sought assurances about the legality of Labour's warmongering. He lasted just two years in the job.

Gen Sir Richard Dannatt, current head of the army, also irked Labour MPs when he suggested last October that it was time to think about withdrawing from Iraq. A general speaking the truth? Labour loyalists were outraged – and none more so perhaps than Kevan Jones, a sometime GMB union hack who became MP for North Durham in 2001.

Jones used to work for ex-chief whip Nick Brown, a close ally of Gordon Broon. Our new prime minister regards the military officer class as elitist tossers. This may explain why backbencher Jones has in recent weeks put down scores of often bizarre parliamentary written questions.

On 9 July he wanted to know how much defence chiefs had claimed in expenses. The biggest sum was the £2,429.53 reclaimed by the chief of the general staff (Dannatt). This figure, it can be noted, is rather less than the £144,246 claimed last year by the Hon Member for North Durham.

On 5 July, Jones asked "what expenses incurred by partners of members of the Army Board may be claimed". Defence minister Derek Twigg replied that "spouses may, exceptionally, accompany Service personnel and civil servants to official functions where there is a clear public interest". How ungenerous this arrangement seems when compared to the lavish provision for lovers/spouses of MPs (and comptrollers general) to join them on foreign jaunts.

On 3 July, Jones was after the cost of housing Dannatt. The state paid £144,858 last year for his official residence. Quite a lot – but hang on, the head of the British army, at a time of al-Qaeda terrorism, is a security risk. Does Jones think our top general should live in a normal house without guards? It's not an argument we have heard Jones make about, say, John Prescott and his continued use of a grand apartment off Whitehall.

On 25 June Jones got down to the nitty gritty, wanting to know how much was spent on flowers by top commanders. Minister Twigg reported that the adjutant general spent £72.12 on flowers for official entertaining while the general officer commanding (Northern Ireland) blew £190 on blooms. Hot on horticultural matters, Jones also wanted to know how much was spent on gardeners for the generals' residences. The MoD admitted it hasn't a clue. Defence budgets tend to deal in slightly bigger numbers, such as how many billions a Labour government is about to spend on nuclear weapons systems from America.

In his long campaign Jones has asked what is being done to reduce the carbon footprint of Dannatt and Co. Pulling out of Iraq and Afghanistan would reduce it considerably, but few Labour MPs seem willing to ask Gordon Brown about that. Jones has also demanded a list of all the official entertaining done by senior officers, soliciting the fact that the adjutant general, wild thing, spent £15.99 on a working lunch in November 2002. The commander in chief, land command, spent £9 on bed and breakfast for two colleagues at a conference. Good grief. It can't have been much of a breakfast.

And on it goes. What sort of cars do the top brass have? How many crashes have they had? Jones submitted several questions about the army ski championships in Chantemerle, south-east France. He has yet to unearth any scandal. Or has he? He found out that £17 had been spent on Supa-Stadia pitch marker for the adjutant general's outdoor tennis court. Jones also demanded a list of all the fair trade products used at senior military residences. The MoD said it hadn't a clue. At a time of severe military overstretch, can we blame them?

On 4 June, Jones thought he had his foes bang to rights. He had heard that the adjutant general's residence had bought some chicken wire. Why? Twigg solemnly disclosed that "the chicken wire was used to prevent persistent damage to the garden by local wildlife, including the consumption of vegetable crops".

All this might be an amusing spat between a chippy Labour MP and the "toff brass" – albeit an expensive one, for Jones's questions have cost thousands of pounds – were it not for the behaviour of a certain Labour MP on 18 May. That was the day on which an almost empty Commons debated a bill to exempt MPs from Freedom of Information laws. The bill would have allowed them to hide their expenses claims.

This particular MP repeatedly attacked opponents of the bill and did everything he could to ease its passage. His name? Kevan Jones. Minute scrutiny of expenses is fine for military commanders at a time of conflict, it seems. But not for MPs.

'Gavel Basher'

THE FEAST OF STEVENS

GORDON BROWN has cosied up to the private security industry by sidestepping the usual mandarins and appointing former Metropolitan Police chief John Stevens as an international security adviser.

While Lord Stevens will give confidential advice to the Prime Minister, his views on security are already widely available – at a price – from the five private companies of which he is director. And if Quest, a private intelligence and security firm he chairs, is too expensive, there's always his cheap-as-chips column in the *News of the World*.

But the link to Quest may have helped Stevens get where he is: Labour peer Baroness Goudie is on its advisory board, and she also assisted Stevens' entry into the House of Lords. A prolific networker, Goudie is keen to be close to the Browns and is trustee of Sarah Brown's children's charity.

Stevens' appointment certainly confused the Tories. Conservative MP Hugo Swire also sits on Quest's advisory board, and Cameron persuaded Stevens to act as an adviser to the Conservatives on border controls, though he was unable to persuade Stevens to run as Tory candidate for London mayor.

While Stevens' business prospects may have been boosted by the appointment, it also means the Prime Minister has a senior adviser with a commercial interest in raising the temperature on security. The difference in outlook was glaring during the recent terror attacks: while Home Secretary Jacqui Smith tried to keep the country cool, with much praised "calmness and dignity", Stevens penned a dramatic *News of the Screws* column announcing that "the terror of 7/7 was awful enough, but now al-Qaeda has imported the tactics of Baghdad and Bali to our streets. And it will get worse before it gets better." As if that weren't enough, he broke with government policy by linking the latest attacks closely to the war in Iraq.

Of course Gordon may be hoping that Stevens will bring new skills to the fight against terror. Indeed, in his autobiography Stevens claims telepathic powers and says it was this "sixth sense" that helped him nail so many villains in his early days that he earned the nickname "Swifty Stevens". Apparently, "sometimes I could sense, simply by looking at a person walking along the street, if she or he had a guilty secret". Reassuring, eh?

PERILS OF PAULINE

AS WE reported in the last *Eye*, Gordon Brown has chosen as his new security minister Admiral Sir Alan West – who was severely reprimanded by a court martial for, er, breaching official security by taking secret documents from the MoD and absent-mindedly leaving them on a Thames towpath.

How could David Cameron top that? Easy. The new shadow minister for security – and national security adviser to Cameron – is the former business partner of a genocidal mass-murderer.

The appointment of Dame Pauline Neville-Jones (for it is she) has won rave reviews, as proof that the Tories are recruiting "all the talents" to give a fresh look to their front bench. But Neville-Jones is about as fresh as last year's vomit. While noting that she's a former Foreign Office mandarin and chair of the joint intelligence committee, the media have quite overlooked a rather more salient point: that she revives unwanted memories of the last Tory government, having been closely involved in two of the bigger scandals of the Major years.

It was she who prepared John Major's evidence to the arms-to-Iraq inquiry, seeking to persuade Lord Justice Scott that the PM was a blameless buffoon who knew nothing about anything. And it was she who led the British delegation to the Balkan peace talks at Dayton, Ohio, where she lobbied strenuously – and successfully – for an end to sanctions against Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic.

By the time of the Dayton agreement, at the end of 1995, Pauline's old boss Douglas Hurd had resigned as foreign secretary and taken a part-time job as deputy chairman of NatWest Markets, on a salary of £250,000. A few months later she left Whitehall to join him as the bank's managing director – whereupon the gruesome twosome jetted off to Belgrade to cash in on the lifting of sanctions which she had helped negotiate.

At a convivial breakfast with Milosevic and his wife, they concluded a deal whereby NatWest Markets would privatise Serbia's post and telephone services for a fee of about $10m. For a further large fee, they would also manage the country's national debt.

Neville-Jones and Hurd denied that there was any connection between their previous roles as globe-trotting appeasers of Milosevic and their subsequent careers as globe-trotting bankers to Milosevic. "This is nonsense," Hurd wrote to the *Daily Mail* in 1997. "Pauline Neville-Jones was in touch with NatWest Markets during 1995 about the possibility of going to the bank but did not join until July 1996."

Whoops! He had accidentally let the cat out of the bag by admitting that she was already negotiating a job at the bank by the time the Dayton accord was signed in December 1995. A mere seven months later, having played such a crucial part in ending Slobo's financial isolation, she was having a "pro forma client meeting" with the Butcher of Belgrade.

Quite how this seedy record qualifies her as a groovy Cameroonie is something of a mystery. Still, Pauline's exchanges with her opposite number should be friendly affairs. Sir Alan West chairs the "advisory board" of the military security firm Qinetiq. And who was chairwoman of Qinetiq at the time of its notorious privatisation in 2002, from which the main beneficiary was the private-equity group Carlyle (whose directors included her old chum John Major)? Step forward… Dame Pauline Neville-Jones!

WARSI ABOUT FACE

NOTHING has bolstered David Cameron's reputation as a tolerant guy so much his appointment to the shadow cabinet of Sayeeda Warsi. That she hasn't actually won an election doesn't matter to her many admirers who acclaim Cameron's decision to give her a seat in the Lords and a job as communities' spokeswoman.

The *Mail* loves her attacks on multi-culturalism and her support for Margaret Thatcher. "My biggest fan base is old Tory blue rinse, the cake-baking lot, they love me!" she gushed to a *Mail* interviewer.

It's not only cake-baking old dears who have fallen for her charms. The *Guardian* approvingly cited her prediction on *Question Time* that victory in Palestinian elections would tame Hamas, even though it turned out to be nonsense.

In fact Warsi can be all things to all men and all women, as her breathtakingly hypocritical campaign against the sitting Labour MP Shahid Malik in Dewsbury in the 2005 election showed.

Infamously, Warsi circulated two very different sets of leaflets. Some carried the Union Flag and blathered on about the twin menaces of the European Union and mass immigration. Others, which seemed aimed at Dewsbury's Muslim-dominated wards, carried a blood-spattered montage of Blair and Bush and troops in Iraq. "As a lawyer I believe the war was illegal," she said. The anti-immigrant rhetoric for whites was also replaced by anti-gay rhetoric for Muslims and a rant about Labour's scrapping of "section 28" and the promotion of "homosexuality and other alternative sexual lifestyles to your children".

Despite her efforts, Malik still beat her; but before she went down she showed she wasn't always the loyal Tory the *Mail* imagined. Warsi was befriended in the campaign by Lord Ahmed, a Labour peer, who at one point appeared to urge Labour supporters to vote for her. She and Ahmed are now very close. Like Warsi, Ahmed was made a life peer and an unelected "voice" for British Muslims, a decision Labour regretted when he said Salman Rushdie had "blood on his hands" rather than the fanatics who have murdered his translators.

Cameron's enemies in his party say Warsi will be just the same. She has already described anti-terror laws as "enough to tip any normal young man into the realms of a radicalized fanatic" and pretended that hundreds of Muslims have been held without charge for weeks.

The real problem with Warsi, however, is the same as with Ahmed and the members of the ultra-reactionary Bangladeshi party Jamaat-i-Islami who dominate the Muslim Council of Britain: no one has elected her. From now until the day she dies, Lady Warsi will be treated as a "Muslim spokeswoman" by everyone from the BBC to the Commission for Racial Equality, even though when she stood for election she was soundly beaten by a fellow Muslim who did not make "dog-whistle" appeals to racism and homophobia or find excuses for suicide bombers.

'Ratbiter'

THE SHOPPING NEWS

MANY groups are watching the Competition Commission's investigation into the big supermarkets with interest.

Small shopkeepers and farmers want the commission to do something to break the supermarkets' stranglehold on trade and on the supply chain, while campaigns like ActionAid are more concerned about the pressure supermarkets put on suppliers in the developing world. The supermarkets themselves are interested too.

Tesco, for example, gave its staff a "comment card" already printed with messages to send to the Competition Commission to counterbalance any "negative comments" and "tell your story" about the benefits of Tesco, emphasising that it is "a good company to work for" that helps "deprived areas" to ensure a "balanced debate".

Tesco has more than 180,000 employees in the UK, but as the *Eye* went to press, just 90 of them had bothered to send the card to the Competition Commission.

Down on the Farm

"WHEN next week came, it was the RPA just the same." How can we possibly leave the astonishing ongoing scandal of the Rural Payments Agency, as shameless and corrupt as anything even this government has ever put its hand to, in the light of the latest twist to the tale?

One of the guilty parties at the heart of the scandal has not only walked off into the sunset with a £250,000 pay-off, but he now has the brass neck to say he plans to sue the government for an even larger heap of cash.

The story so far centres on the monumental cock-up made by Defra and the late Mrs Beckett, when they ordered the RPA to go for the most complicated option when distributing EU subsidy payments to English farmers.

This was three years ago, when the RPA was still run by Johnston McNeill from Northern Ireland, formerly a tinpot dictator over the meat industry as head of the Meat Hygiene Service. Apparently unable to do the job he was paid for, McNeill handed the task of organising the payment of EU subsidies to a firm of consultants, Accenture, in return for £18m.

Accenture made such a hash of it that farmers had to wait months, even years, for the money they were owed, losing millions of pounds in interest to the banks from whom they had to borrow to tide themselves over. Several farmers became so desperate they committed suicide.

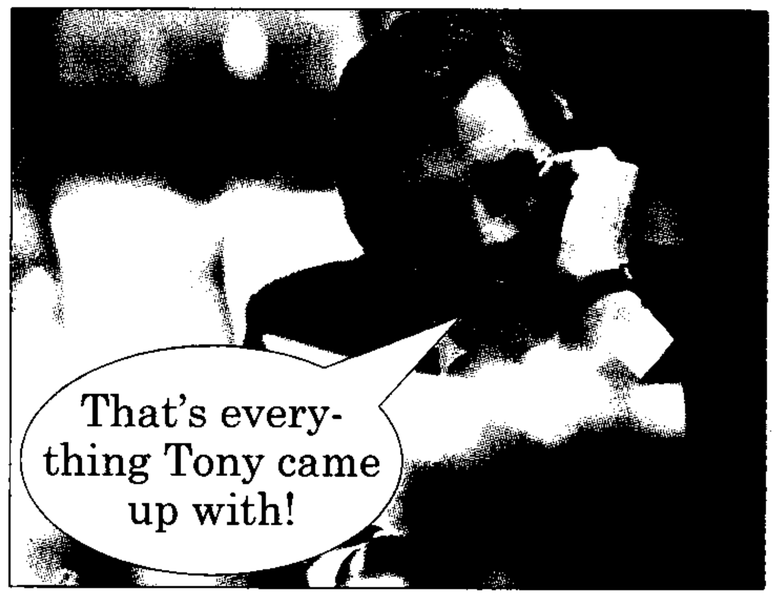
McNeill then paid Accenture a further £19m to sort out the mess it had itself made. Brussels got so angry that farmers were not getting paid that it withheld £350m of the money it owed to Britain. Gordon Brown got so angry he told Defra there was no way the Treasury was going to make up the shortfall, and it would have to find it out of its existing money. Defra slashed the spending of various parts of its empire on such useful things as flood defences and repairing dangerous canal banks. Mrs Beckett, as a reward for having made such an unholy mess, was promoted to Foreign Secretary. Most of the senior staff of the RPA were then rewarded with fat bonuses. The only person relieved of his post was McNeill.

Nevertheless even McNeill was for a long time allowed to stay at home drawing his £114,000-a-year salary before finally being sacked. But he too was then rewarded with £60,000 in compensation, half a year's additional salary of £56,000, a lump sum of £42,000 into his pension fund and a pension of £12,800 a year on top. He promptly announced his plans to appeal for wrongful dismissal in the hope of getting an even larger handout (funny how keen are the officials of the RPA to get their own handouts when they proved so incapable of giving money to the farmers).

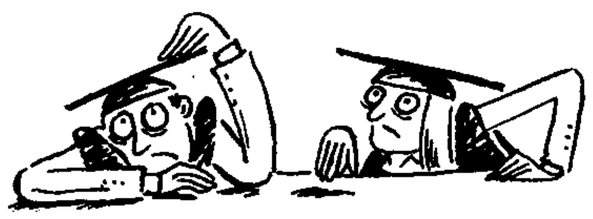
At least the MPs on the public accounts committee were damning about Beckett and Mr McNeill, even though they strangely let Accenture off the hook for having taken the taxpayers for a £37m ride in the first place. We now learn that it may be 2012 before the mess is sorted out. We also learn that Defra may be planning to outsource the whole operation to the private sector. Front-runners to land the contract? Yes, you guessed it: Accenture.

'Muckspreader'

BROWN TO SCRAP RUBBISH POLICIES



THE EXAMINERS EXAMINED



Private Eye presents its exclusive Report on this year's GCSEs...

Most predictable questions

1. English Literature: *"Explore the ways in which Hardy makes this such a moving moment in the novel"* (OCR English Literature). In fact, take *any* passage from *any* of the set texts, replace Hardy's name with the relevant writer and you have most of the English Literature questions for *any* exam board.

2. Maths: Any simultaneous equation eg 5x + 6y = 28, x = 3y = 2; find x and y (Edexcel)

3. French: The Reading paper asked some very familiar questions on well-worn subjects: the family, transport, pocket money and a famous person, who this year was the French pop singer Larusso. (Edexcel)

4. Design and Technology: The Design Theory paper (OCR) included a question about how to design, build, use and test a mechanism. This question comes up every year.

Most pathetic attempt to be hip

English GCSE paper 1, Media, Non-Fiction and Information, OCR exam board. Stung by criticism that English GCSE is out of touch, the exam boards tried – and failed miserably – to be "cool". Students were asked to read an extract from the ancient Bob Dylan's *Chronicles Volume 1* and a *Daily Mail* article on *Big Brother*.

Most impossible question

In the same paper pupils were asked to "explain concisely" Dylan's thoughts.

Thinnest question imaginable

The above exam also asked students to read a *Daily Mail* article where Quentin Letts and Dr Raj Persaud attempted to argue whether *Big Brother* was Compulsive or Repulsive. Candidates were then asked to comment on the content of their respective arguments.

Most politically correct exam

English GCSE Different Cultures papers (OCR and AQA). Pupils study either poems or stories by generally little known authors from around the world and are *always* asked how the writers present their cultures in their work. The stories/poems are usually clunkingly bad or poorly translated; but students are still required to study them by the National Curriculum.

Most politically incorrect exam

English Different Cultures paper (OCR). This year pupils had to read an extract in which a Caribbean father brutally beats up his son. They were then asked to write about how elders treat the young in the stories they had read in a multi-cultural collection called *Opening Worlds*. Most students were hard pressed to find a single instance where the elders had treated the young well as the stories catalogue a litany of abuse and violence wreaked upon children.

Biggest shocks

Geography GCSE (Edexcel). The lack of any obvious case studies referring to specific locations (like the Amazon Rainforest, say) caused panic. Pupils expected obvious prompts so they could pour out their geographical knowledge on automatic pilot. They did not expect to pause and think a little.

French Writing Paper (Edexcel). Students were totally flummoxed when they were asked to answer a question on the environment where they had to write about the pros and cons of different types of transport, now and in the future, and give their personal opinions. This topic hadn't come up before and many students simply didn't have the vocabulary to write about it.

Proper exam heading for extinction

GCSE Science (all boards). This was the last year that students actually had to answer real science questions, according to many teachers. Though the papers were predictable, they did at least test scientific knowledge.

In **Physics** pupils were expected to provide short answers and calculations based on the old warhorses of gas particles, electro-magnetism, radiation, energy, Newton's Laws Of Motion, motors and the solar system. In **Biology** questions were less predictable but the subjects were: the human eye and lens, photosynthesis, enzymes, hormones, DNA and genetics, and the nitrogen cycle.

In Year 10 pupils sat the first modules of the new GCSE Science, which from now on will replace the old exam. They will sit more modules next year and the results will be added together to form an overall grade. Many science teachers insist that pupils will not be tested on proper science any more. "You don't actually have to know much science at all to do the new GCSE Science," one physicist confessed. "A cynic might say the government knows that physicists, chemists and biologists are a dying breed in schools, and the old course actually required us to teach it. Now a tramp off the street could muster together a few science lessons for the new GCSE."

The questions in the Year 10 Physics paper (AQA) bore this out. Having explained what gamma radiation was, the first question asked: "What is gamma radiation?" Other questions included: "What arguments could the company give to persuade people that a wind farm is a good idea?" (2 marks) and "Describe the 'big bang' theory' (2 marks).

Vaguest exam

Art (Edexcel). Pupils were asked to make anything in any media based on the concept of "Wraps" – er, wrapping things up.

'Invigilator'

THOSE RESULTS IN FULL*...

*(*based on 2006)*

Exam board most likely to award an A*-C grade

OCR

Exam board least likely to award an A*-C grade

AQA

Subject and exam board most likely to attract an A*-C GCSE grade (excluding Sciences)

Spanish (OCR) with 77.6 percent of pupils attaining A*-C

Subject and exam board least likely to attract an A*-C GCSE grade (excluding Sciences)

Maths (AQA) with 51.6 per cent of pupils attaining A*-C grade.

"Remember when they just wrote 'Kick me' on other kids' backs?..."

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

THE Merchants Academy school in Bristol has found an exciting new child-friendly sponsor to fill its coughers (*geddit?!?*) – the cigarette manufacturer Imperial Tobacco!

The company has generously given £120,000 to "support adult education and community-based activities" at the school, due to open in 2008.

Imperial was asked for the money by the school's main backer, a 450-year-old, invitation-only group of 65 prominent business "executives" called the Society of Merchant Venturers, whose early members were involved in trading not only tobacco but slaves too. The Merchants say: "The Imperial name and logo will not be used to promote the centre or its activities but may be included in a list of donors."

A few years ago, during a parliamentary hearing on tobacco smuggling, the chief executive of Imperial Tobacco, Gareth Davis, was labelled a "liar" and a "crook" by MPs. Who better to be involved in the brave new world of education?

● EDUCATION chiefs in Preston, Lancashire, are understood to be lining up Carphone Warehouse to become main sponsor of the town's first academy – despite government guidelines that mobile phone companies should not target their advertising or promotions at children.

The school, to be formed from the merger of Fulwood and Tulketh high schools, would be close to the huge Carphone Warehouse call centre at Tulketh Mill.

● THE big boast for city academies is that parents are queuing to get their kids in. But one doing its best to deter them is the Djanogly City Academy in Nottingham, which specialises in IT.

Visitors to its website wondering what an academy is are told "click here for the Wikipedia definition – we get a mention!" And indeed it does: "Previously this school performed extremely well, but since becoming an Academy, is now at the bottom of the league tables."

● HOW useful are the sponsors brought in to run the academies? On the evidence so far, not very.

A recent parliamentary question from Old Labour's Austin Mitchell reveals that of the 26 academies where building is finished, 12 have yet to receive the money promised by the sponsor – despite a policy that the businessmen and charities behind them should pay up by completion.

Some of the largest gaps between promised and actual contributions are to be found at four finished academies sponsored by the United Learning Trust (ULT) in Lambeth, Northampton, Manchester and Salford. These have been promised £7.5m but have received just £3.65m. ULT insists it has made every payment due under its agreements, suggesting a more relaxed attitude to sponsorship than the government professes. The payment schedules remain secret as they're – surprise, surprise – "commercially confidential".

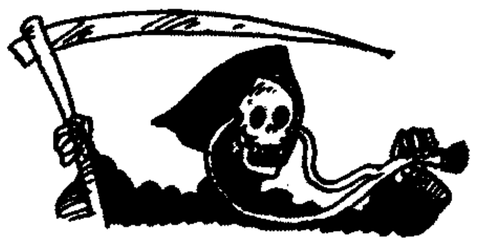
HIGH PRINCIPALS

THE principal of Walsall College, in the West Midlands, and another senior manager have been conspicuous by their absence from end of term activities.

The college has refused to say what is going on, other than that principal Chris Ball and head of business Les Burns are on authorised paid leave, leaving staff and students baffled and frustrated. With morale already low thanks to compulsory redundancies, the University and College Union called on the governors to explain as "it cannot help the college's reputation or staff morale for this to remain a secret".

The college was investigated by both the National Audit Office and the Information Commissioner last year over concerns about its decision to pay an expensive private consultant to organise hundreds of job cuts (*Eye* 1155). However, while denying that the sudden "leave of absence" was related to previous issues, the Learning and Skills Council let slip to the *Birmingham Post* that it was "an internal issue which relates to behaviour".

DOING THE ROUNDS



MEDICINEBALLS

Foreign bodies

THE NHS has never been quintessentially British: 40 percent of the doctors and a quarter of the nurses who are today registered to work in it qualified overseas.

They've propped up the NHS since its inception, in fact; working in areas shunned by British graduates, in single-handed GP practices in the most deprived areas or dead-end hospital jobs with no chance of career progression.

Next year, however, many overseas doctors will lose their work permits because we've finally started to train more of our own. Only they all want proper training posts and consultant jobs, not the career-stagnating gaps left for those who miss out in the MTAS bun fight (Eyes passim).

We steal medical staff from African and Asian countries where the life expectancy is barely half ours, treat them like shit and then send them packing at short notice. Now they've got the added delight of a terror-phobic backlash when many came here to escape carnage in their own countries.

New Health Secretary Alan Johnson's charm offensive on the NHS was delayed by the weather but he seems to have cottoned on to the fact that you can't run an organisation of a million and a quarter people from a box in Whitehall, part time, while the great over-washed in Hull are demanding parity in flood defences with Sheffield.

So instead it's up to junior Health Minister Professor Ara Darzi, an Armenian born in Baghdad and trained in Ireland, to save the NHS part time, in-between minimally invasive robot assisted operations. The Darzi review of the NHS in London lists a long line of previous reviews that made no difference to the vast inequalities in healthcare. But this time he's going to "listen to Londoners, build a clinical consensus, provide evidence for the recommendations and work with the mayor and London boroughs".

Alas, politicians need "quick wins", which means not enough listening and too much change, too quickly. Johnson is already sounding quite the hypocrite, promising an end to top-down meddling in this new era of Brownian motion. Johnson also demonstrated his naivety by claiming the increase in life expectancy since the war was entirely due to the great scientific advances of the NHS, rather than largely due to economic and public health improvements.

Poor people get sick, and tackling poverty is a far better way of reducing health inequality than pouring money into the NHS. For those requiring NHS treatment, the biggest issue is the training and competence of the staff, rather than how healthcare is delivered (on the bus, in Tesco's, at a polyclinic). The front line of the NHS is very light on experience and the generalists who can sort out the frail, obese elderly are a dying breed. Intensive care is full off 85 year olds, slowly having the life sucked out of them and preventing further waiting list reductions, and yet still huge pressure is piled on to hit the 18-week target. Less urgent patients leapfrog over the urgent every day. Johnson needs to give power for clinical decisions back to the staff; but will Brown be able to let go? Whatever happens, Darzi will survive. Anaesthetists often commit suicide because they have self doubt and access to good drugs. Surgeons rarely do, because they are always right.

M.D.

CON-SULTANTS

***WHOOPS!* For the third month in a row staff health workers in Leicestershire found thousands of pounds missing from their pay.**

The University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust farmed out its payroll department to – surprise, surprise – Capita, in April. Trust board chairman Martin Hindle said Capita had been chosen because of its "good track record". Where's he been?

In April staff discovered that they were missing overtime or unsocial hours bonuses, while several found that they hadn't been paid at all. Despite promises to do better, May's pay went seriously awry and when payslips went out at the end of June, many were *still* wrong. Around 4,000 staff are thought to have been affected.

The hospital itself has been meeting bank charges incurred by any staff who go overdrawn and has now fined Capita for the failures. Stressed out staff say they too should be compensated for months of financial worry.

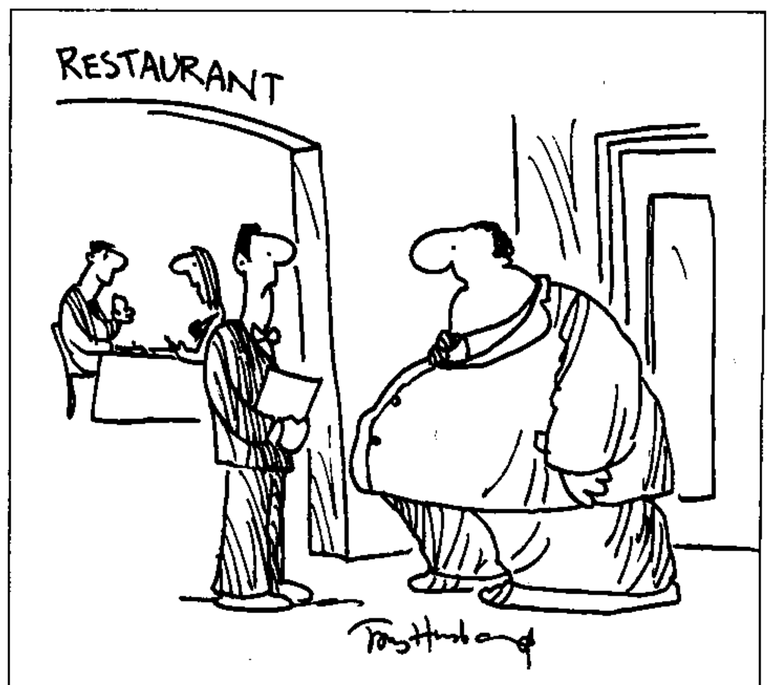
NHS GRAVY AWARDS 2007

ENTRANTS for the 2007 NHS Gravy Awards are arriving thick and lumpy, as hundreds of senior managers pocket vast pay-offs from one job only to land another job elsewhere in the NHS a short time later costing taxpayers hundreds of millions of pounds.

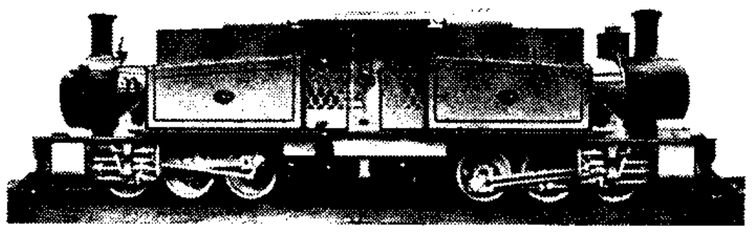
Why such wasteful largesse? The NHS was set up as a national body but operates as if it were some 400-plus different organisations, a constantly changing network of trusts, authorities and commissions. Hence a chief executive or director can be "re-organised" out of his job one day, receive a fat pay-off including pension provision and, after a month's lapse, walk straight into another trust or health authority with an equally fat salary and benefits package.

Thus it was that when Chris Town, chief executive of the former Greater Peterborough primary care trust, was made redundant from his £120,000-a-year post, he received a redundancy package worth £480,000 as part of the latest "patient-led" NHS shake-up. His nice and not-so-little pay-off was underwritten by the strategic health authority, which at the time was £152m in the red. And what does Mr Town do now? Er... he works on an occasional basis for the NHS's "Working in Partnership Programme" for which he earns around £600 a day...

Who will secure the biggest NHS gravy train payout under the reorganisation of new health minister Sir Ara Darzi? Watch this space…



"Table for four, please"



SIGNAL FAILURES

Stagecoach – an apology

IN DECEMBER *Eye* 1174 reported that Stagecoach shareholders would receive a windfall of at least £400m, with more than £100m for sibling Stagecoach founders Brian Souter and Ann Gloag. We now acknowledge that this was inaccurate and highly misleading.

The actual amount given to shareholders in May/June was in fact "around £700m", according to Stagecoach results released late last month. We apologise for any distress our report might have caused to shareholders who may have feared being plunged into poverty, and recognise that they are deserving recipients of subsidy paid to Stagecoach for its trains and buses.

Furthermore the *Eye* may have given the impression that the 20 percent off-peak fare rise on Stagecoach's South West Trains franchise, the removal of train seats to create more standing room, the dumping of 120 carriages as surplus to requirements and downgrading of trains on the Portsmouth line were unfair on passengers. In light of the above, we are happy to acknowledge that Stagecoach has more pressing calls on its funds and trust that passengers who fail to buy a ticket before travel because of long queues at the booking office will be magnanimous when SWT guards implement a recent order to charge the maximum peak fare, regardless of the circumstances.

THE misery at First Great Western and First Capital Connect, reflected in recent data, may have disappointed passengers after the customary upbeat press release that accompanies every new rail franchise. But careful wording in the statement announcing the FGW and FCC franchises shows that civil servants knew what was coming.

"On both franchises FirstGroup expects to deliver continuous improvement in service performance," said the Transport Department's statement back in December 2005. Mandarins had specified the franchises, right down to the number of carriages, and awarded "greater western" to the company with the worst punctuality (*Eye* 1145). Four months before the franchises began the government was already passing the buck, ascribing the promise of "continuous improvement" to FirstGroup rather than itself.

New figures from the rail regulator record 89.4 percent punctuality by Wessex Trains in its final quarter. One year later, after Wessex had become part of FGW, punctuality was 82.5 percent – by far the worst of all regional operators. Meanwhile punctuality on FGW's "high speed services" fell to 75.6 percent – by far the worst of all "long distance operators". FGW's peak London commuter services plunged to 69.5 percent – by far the worst of all London commuter operators. Newly published overcrowding figures show FGW trains as the first, second, fourth and eighth most packed London commuter trains; only one FGW train was in the equivalent top 10 the previous year, at number six. There are now two Thameslink trains (now part of FCC) instead of one in the top 10. So now we know why the government didn't promise "continuous improvement".

PS: London's rail watchdog has asked the government to consider ending FGW's franchise now. Fat chance. GNER's new franchise is ending early because of financial troubles – the same reason Connex South Eastern was kicked out in 2003. On FGW it's the passengers who are in trouble: they're too insignificant to justify even a rap over the knuckles for FirstGroup, let alone terminating a franchise. In any case, how can the government penalise FirstGroup when some of the troubles are of the government's making?

ARRIVA will raise unregulated fares on its future Cross-country franchise by an average of 3.4 percent more than inflation each year, to make them "more focused on those who need the added value of maximum flexibility".

Complaints have already begun, but passengers on Arriva's Welsh franchise may wonder if the decimal point is misplaced after Arriva's fare rise in May (not to be confused with Arriva's fare rise in January) saw ticket prices leap by up to 34 percent.

'Dr B Ching'

TVE

The Alastair Campbell Diaries (BBC2)

IN THE same BBC1 launch, in which network honcho Peter Fincham disastrously suggested that Brenda had a hissy fit while being photographed by a top *Vanity Fair* snapper, it was also revealed that Tony Blair has recorded a series of interviews for the channel about his time in office.

There is a tradition of recently departed premiers being given several confessional slots in the schedules: Thatcher and Major both got three-part series of their own, coinciding with the release of their memoirs.

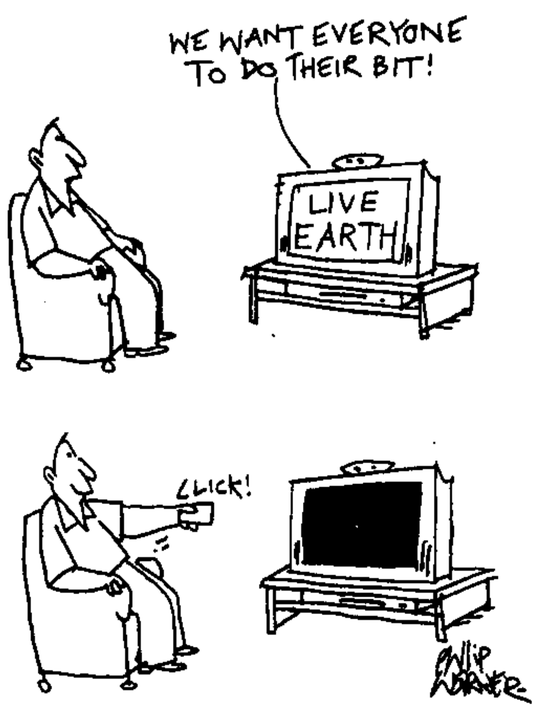
In neither case, however, does one remember these shows being treated by the BBC as if a dramatisation by Shakespeare of an unknown sequel to the Bible had been discovered in a house in Stratford. The programmes were promoted and shown as standard current affairs fodder.

Yet, in the case of the journals of Alastair Campbell, a foreign visitor who had not followed the former *Mirror* man's journey from angry hack to scourge of angry hacks would surely not have understood that the book being so enthusiastically serialised and discussed was the self-serving scribblings of a background government official who had attacked the reputation of the BBC and ended the career of several of its senior employees. They would surely have believed that Britain was celebrating the release of the life story of a man who improbably combined a great career as a statesman with the status as best-selling and best-loved writer in the land had released his latest volume.

The week began with a cosy chat on Marr's sofa, continuing through lead stories on BBC bulletins, two separate discussions on *Newsnight* at the beginning and end of the week, virtually comma-by-comma commentary on BBC News 24 for several days and then, amazingly, the sort of documentary trilogy previously reserved for former PMs.

The Alastair Campbell Diaries was a disgrace in every way, failing editorially, technically and as entertainment. Even BBC1's soft profile of Cherie Blair with Fiona Bruce had the nous to include Piers Morgan being rude about Mrs Blair as at least a shot at editorial balance.

But, over three hours of television, Ally was just allowed to drone on, reading extracts from his book in a nervous, non-performer's voice which, falling away at the end of every line, sounded oddly like an amateur impersonation of Clive James.



These turgid renditions were then illustrated with familiar footage – Blair entering Number 10, or eulogising Diana – with sacred music played over them. The only other concession to the fact that this programme was being transmitted on a visual medium was lots of moody footage of Campbell writing his diaries or gazing out of the window with a mug of tea to decorate sections dealing with, for example, the suicides of people he crossed. In order to look as much like *The West Wing* as possible, Campbell's preferred self-image. these sequences are shot in black and white.

There were two problems with this approach. One, with the BBC currently trying to be squeaky-clean after Ofcom's fifty grand fine on *Blue Peter*, is that the sequences of Al looking literary or moody should clearly have been labelled "Reconstruction" as it is not possible that a BBC film-crew was with him at the time he was writing the historical entries he is reading.

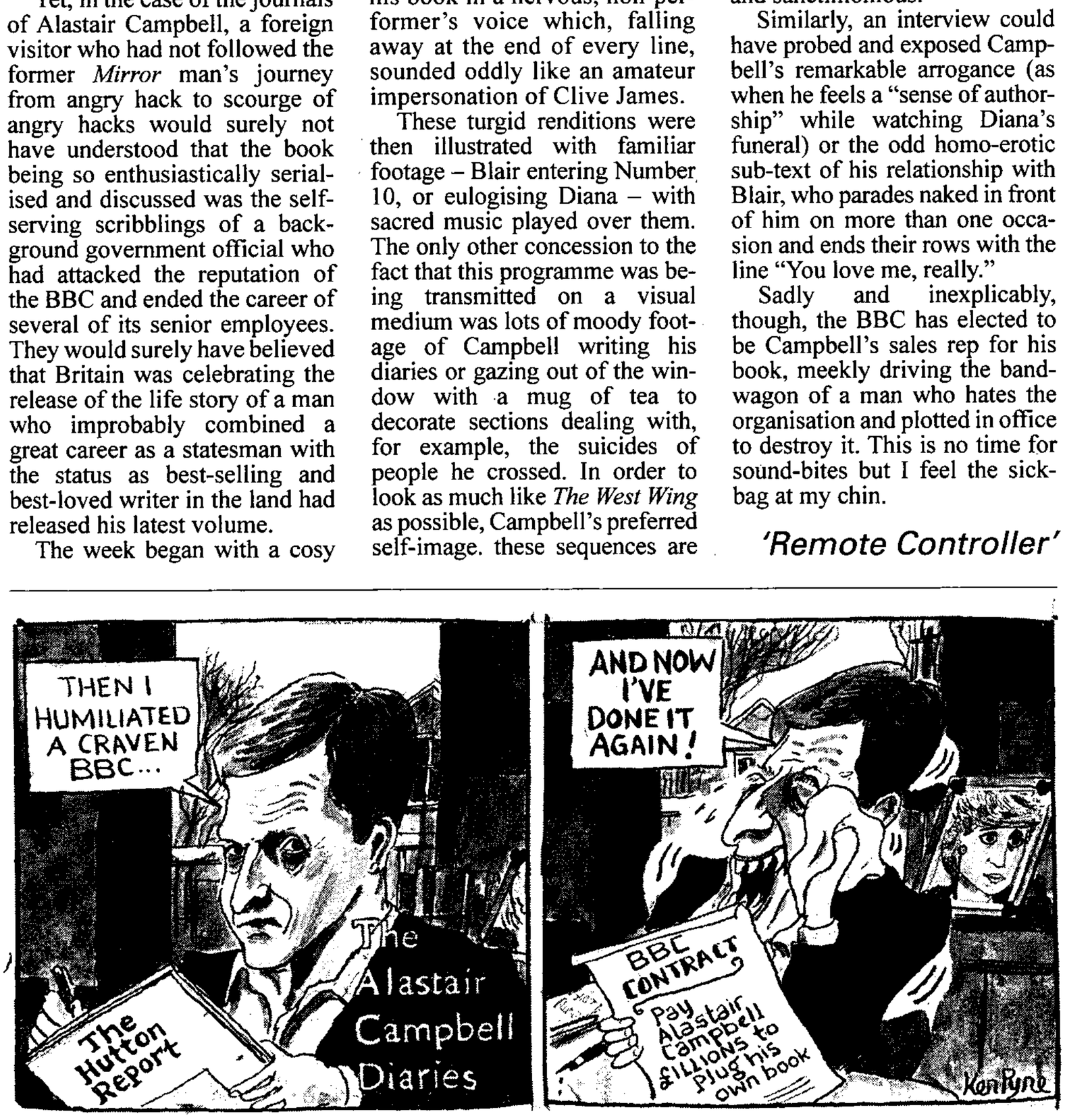
The other, much graver, problem is that Campbell has been open about the fact that this first volume of the diaries is a sanitised account, leaving out entries which would cause damage to either Blair or Brown. Once this bowdlerisation was acknowledged, the BBC should probably have told the diarist to see if Channel 4 or ITV were interested in publicising his book for him but, at the very least, the three documentaries should have included interviews in which he was challenged on his inclusions and exclusions, as Thatcher, Major and presumably Blair were required to do with theirs.

So, for example, when the diary claims that Blair's remark before the Irish talks that "this is no time for sound-bites... but I feel the hand of history on our shoulders" was "a hell of a sound-bite – the press loved it!", someone could have pointed out that the comment was immediately and widely mocked for being contradictory and sanctimonious.

Similarly, an interview could have probed and exposed Campbell's remarkable arrogance (as when he feels a "sense of authorship" while watching Diana's funeral) or the odd homo-erotic sub-text of his relationship with Blair, who parades naked in front of him on more than one occasion and ends their rows with the line "You love me, really."

Sadly and inexplicably, though, the BBC has elected to be Campbell's sales rep for his book, meekly driving the bandwagon of a man who hates the organisation and plotted in office to destroy it. This is no time for sound-bites but I feel the sick-bag at my chin.

'Remote Controller'


THEN I HUMILIATED A CRAVEN BBC...
The Hutton Report
The Alastair Campbell Diaries
AND NOW I'VE DONE IT AGAIN!
BBC CONTRACT
Pay Alastair Campbell £1LLIONS to plug his own book
Ken Pyne

AUNTIE'S BLOOMERS

WHILE no one yet knows exactly where the blame lies for last week's spectacular cock-up over the BBC's *A Year With The Queen*, one thing is for certain: we can expect many more such misrepresentations in the future.

The corporation invested £22.3m in on-air trails last year. With closing credits and moments of quiet reflection on all channels abandoned in favour of split-screen "coming next" boxes, and the corporation deeming adverts for upcoming dramas more important than the departing words of a prime minister to the Commons, the pressure on the promotions department – staffed almost entirely by what Michael Grade calls "young talent that have not been trained properly" – to produce eye-catching 30-second mini-dramas can only increase.

The offending scenes of Her Maj and Annie Liebovitz, however, were something else: a promotional trail for the new season made exclusively for members of the press, whose howls of indignation 24 hours later may have been magnified by the fact that none of them thought it worth putting in a call to the palace for comment before splashing it all over their own front pages. The BBC maintains that the sequence was passed to them in that form by RDF, the independent company which made the series.

The company's more usual fare is tired reality formats such as *Shipwrecked* and *Wife Swap*, formats which rely on contrived confrontation for their very existence, and, as many rather lower-profile participants have testified in the past, are quite happy to engineer it when none occurs. Is it that surprising that editors tasked with making "an early assembly of the footage" handed to them from the palace simply followed a tried and tested formula?

At least the row comes too late to derail RDF's latest commission: ITV1's *The Great Pretender,* an afternoon gameshow hosted by Chris Tarrant which the makers of *Faking It* describe as "the ultimate game of duplicity and bluff".

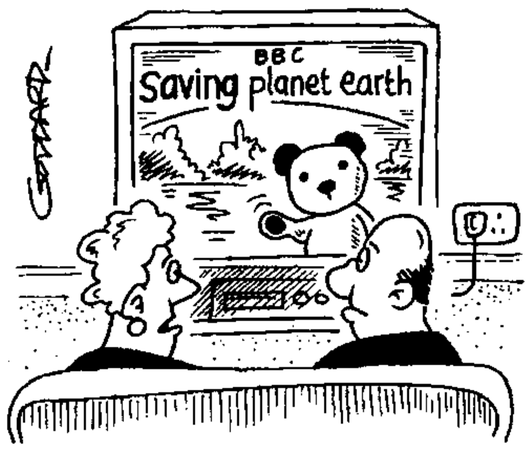
The BBC, meanwhile, is frantic to find out what other skeletons are in the cupboard. Director-general Mark Thompson emailed staff last Friday lamenting the way the *Blue Peter* phone-in scandal and the "misleading" edit of the Queen "defy our values and threaten the precious relationship of trust between the BBC and our audiences".

He added: "The vast majority of you ensure our TV, radio and interactive content is accurate, fair and complies with our own clear editorial guidelines and Ofcom's code. We cannot allow even a small number of lapses, whether intentional or as a result of sloppiness, to undermine our reputation and the confidence of the public... If you know of any further incident, please let us know."

Right you are. In the episode of *Incredible Animal Journeys* broadcast on BBC1 on 23 May, presenter Steve Leonard was not, as the programme implied, shown following the migration of a pregnant caribou via GPS receiver from a hotel room in the Yukon. He was pretending to do so, several weeks later, and nearly 5,000 miles away.

An eagle-eyed viewer who spotted a British electrical socket in the background and wrote to the BBC to complain was told that the scene had been "reconstructed in the UK as it happened in Canada" – but despite those editorial guidelines stating very clearly that "reconstructions should be labelled as reconstructions", it, er, wasn't.

PS: Thompson's email went out before another "misleading edit" row erupted (over a *Newsnight* hatchet job on Gordon Brown). But more cynical staff at White City weren't surprised by any of the editorial cock-ups. If Thompson hadn't made so many experienced staff redundant, they murmured, handing their jobs to school-leavers and independent production companies who are not subject to the BBC's strict guidelines, none of these problems would have happened in the first place.



"It's surprising who turns out to be an environmental expert, isn't it?"

MEDIA NEWS

WHY the flurry of calls to Amnesty International's London HQ a fortnight ago from Sky News? Were the Murdoch hacks suddenly worried about an innocent *languishing* in a far-off jail?

Er, no. They were simply pissed off that the BBC and not Sky had won the TV news prize in Amnesty's annual media awards.

The winning piece, on organ transplants in China, became the subject of a furious internal email at Sky. "Sky's Dominic Waghorn and his team had revealed the same outrage FIVE MONTHS earlier!" it stormed. "The BBC reporter… not only visited the same hospital as Dominic and used the same undercover techniques; he also had the audacity to bill his cheap imitation as an 'exclusive'."

The email gave Amnesty spokesman Mike Blakemore's direct line and urged all Sky staff to get on the blower. "Amnesty, of course, has a cast-iron reputation for championing injustice so I feel confident they will take up our cause with gusto," the email concluded with no lack of proportion.

HUNDREDS of jubilant BBC staff gathered in the car park at Television Centre to celebrate Alan Johnston's release after 114 harrowing days in captivity, including Jeremy Bowen, Sophie Raworth and other well known hacks.

Just as a live satellite message from Johnston got underway, up swept a chauffeur-driven car carrying Natasha Kaplinsky – who took one look at the slight drizzle outside and stayed put, patting her hair protectively.

After five minutes a break in the rain allowed her to make a quick dash to the front door. Behind her the crowd watched a gaunt, weary Johnston saying that he'd gone straight to the barbers after his release to get rid of "that just-kidnapped look". Alas, Natasha missed the joke as she rushed inside before the drizzle could endanger her flawless barnet.

She went to a grammar school in Walthamstow and London University. She is married to Richard Mawhinney, brother of the former Tony Party chairman, Brian.

The Times on Baroness Scotland

GOING LIVE

HOW to give appetising coverage to story of the European Food Safety Authority and its warning about additive E128, linked to cancer and present in some brands of sausages?

ITV lunchtime news went live to consumer editor Chris Choi, who was holding two platefuls of bangers and was billed as appearing "LIVE from central London".

As indeed he was… standing in the ITN canteen on Gray's Inn Road, just metres away from the studio.

THE PITFALLS OF HAVING A MAGAZINE HOUSE STYLE WHERE YOU PUT ATTRIBUTIONS DIRECTLY UNDERNEATH A QUOTE IN JUST SLIGHTLY SMALLER LETTERS

THIS TIME WE WANT TO MOVE AHEAD SWIFTLY WITH JOB CUTS AND RETRAINING
MARK THOMPSON

Ariel

Number crunching

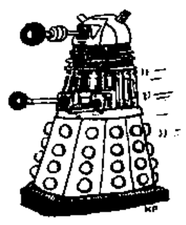
£700,000 ■ Prize money at Wimbledon for both men's and women's winners, equal for first time this year

£186,500 ■ Roger Federer's hourly rate for final

£466,500 ■ Venus Williams's hourly rate for final

A VERY INAPPROPRIATE PLACE FOR AN ANTONY GORMLEY

BIRTSPEAK 2.0



"Key Responsibilities: To develop and maintain 360 degree collaborative working relationships with television production areas, feeding in to and delivering ideas, evolving working practices and work effectively as part of a strong and effective team.

To generate ideas encouraging active participation from the children's audience and to develop 360 degree concepts and user generated content, making the most of all relevant platforms…

– Job advert, assistant producer, BBC Children's Programmes

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC1

Anne Robinson: RoSPA is the acronym for the Royal Society for the Prevention of what?

Contestant: Animals.

AR: What "E" is the substance that forms a hard protective layer around the teeth?

Contestant: Enema.

AR: Opening in 2006, which West End musical features insulting Frenchmen, a limbless knight, and a killer rabbit?

Contestant: Chicago.

Metro Radio

Presenter: Which ancient army was discovered in China in 1974?

Contestant: The Territorial Army.

AD NAUSEAM

"WHATEVER my fate, I will face it with gratitude, some wisdom, blind optimism and, hopefully, one hell of a guardian angel to cover for me. I must surely be the luckiest bastard to ever walk on God's green earth."

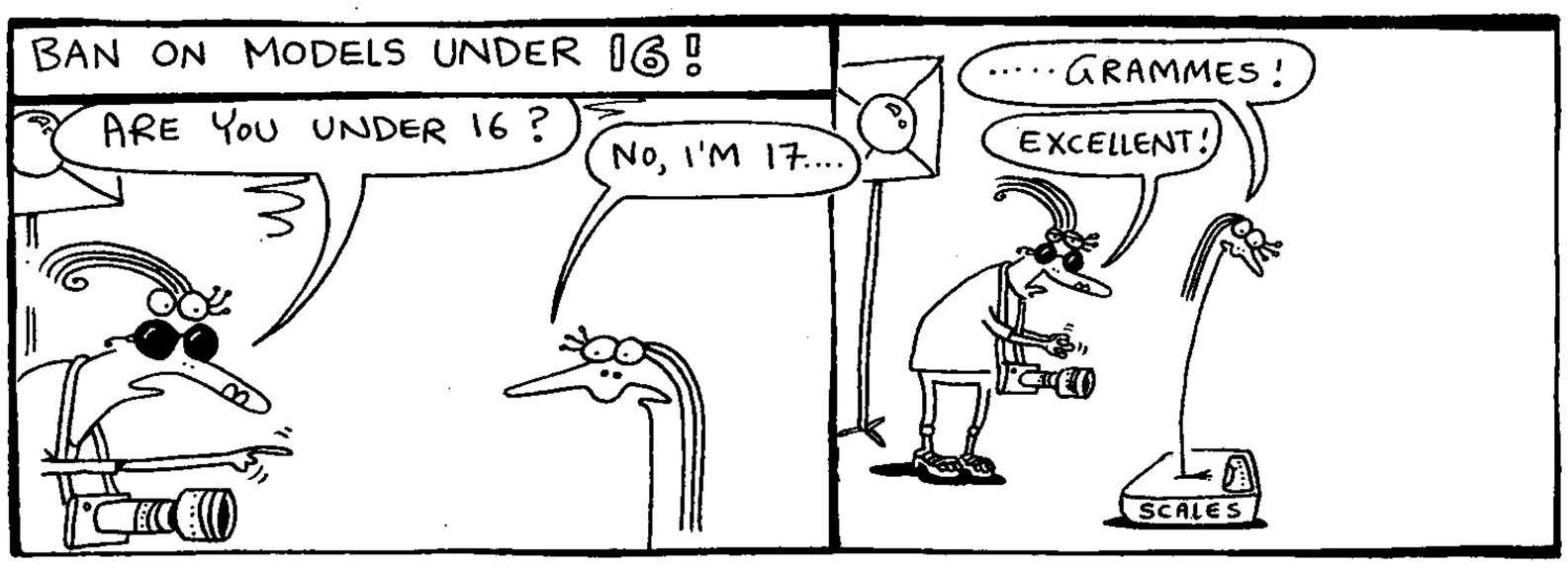
So said Jonathan Durden in May. In his valedictory column for *Media Week*, he also announced that he was leaving PHD, the media agency he co-founded 17 years ago and which had made him a multi-millionaire. And then he went in to the *Big Brother* house. Why? "Basically, I'm doing it because I'm a complete egomaniac."

Alas, Durden's self-love has been his downfall. He lasted 18 days and two eviction votes before walking out when he learned that his grandmother had died. Then, all too predictably, the *News of the World* sent in the attack dogs and ripped the flamboyant, party-loving (etc, etc) Durden to shreds. Highlights included spending £3,670 on 16 escort girls in the month before he entered the house. (He was engaged and had been due to get married the day he left.) It also emerged he was a cocaine addict; Durden currently resides in the Priory, no doubt pondering his wisdom, his blind optimism and the untimely no-show from his guardian angel.

His fall is only remarkable because he made his name and money running a media agency. Media planners and buyers require an intimate knowledge of newspapers, their journalistic styles, target audiences and their methods. To have gone on *Big Brother* with a rap sheet like Durden's, knowing full well that reality show contestants are tabloid cannon fodder, was astonishingly dense. Before his stint in the house Durden was made a partner at agency Miles Calcraft Briginshaw Duffy, which has since given him its "full support". But it's not so much his morals as his professional judgement that's questionable after a snafu like this one.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

LOAD OF JOSH

ONE reason voters in Brighton and Hove kicked out the Labour party in May was because of its support for the unpopular King Alfred development – the ugly "tin can towers" by trendy architect Frank Gehry, whose 750 flats would loom 28 floors above Hove's Regency terraces.

The Conservatives, now the biggest party in Skidrow-on-Sea, have always opposed the scheme. But since developers Karis turned nasty last month and threatened to sue Skidrow council for £60m if the King Alfred was delayed, the Tories are in a dilemma because planning approval had already been granted (at the 11th hour) by Labour.

"We will go at this with such legal vigour the city will be reeling from the repercussions for years," snarled Josh Arghiros, MD of Karis. But perhaps Arghiros is not as terrifying as he seems.

According to Companies House, Karis Limited's accounts are more than two years overdue, and the last ones filed, in 2004, show a deficit of nearly £2m. They carry an auditor's "severe or adverse" disclaimer relating to a "disagreement of a fundamental nature". Parent company Karis Holdings' accounts are also two years late, and also carry an auditors' disclaimer. A third Arghiros company, Karis Developments Ltd, carries an "above average risk" credit score and has an undischarged county court judgment dating back to 2004. Karis Holdings' principal shareholder is a subsidiary of the Dutch financial giant ING.

Certainly anything Arghiros says needs a large pinch of salt – like his claim that Hollywood actor Brad Pitt was a key member of the design team for the King Alfred: "He... will be involved all the way," Arghiros said in May 2005. "He is genuinely excited about the project – it has captured his imagination." In fact Pitt's involvement, as *Eye* 1150 reported, amounted to having his photograph taken with a model of the towers on a visit to Gehry's office – and the great architect never heard from him again.

Many, however, believe the clinching argument against Gehry's ghastly scheme is that Brighton broadcaster and megabore Simon Fanshawe thinks it's a good idea.

STOKE SHITTY

IN 1997 Stoke-on-Trent council spent £3.1m of taxpayers' money to help Stoke City football club build a new stadium. The deal attracted criticism from locals who felt the money could have been better spent.

Ten years on, the council's involvement with Stoke FC is again mired in controversy after it decided, without public consultation, to sell its 36 percent share in the site to the club at the knockdown price of £5m. Given the huge increase in property and land prices since 1997 and the fact that when it was purchased it was a derelict former coal mine and today is a busy retail park, many locals see £5m as a steal. More realistic estimates put the land's value at about £30m.

PS: The chairman of Stoke City is internet betting tycoon Peter Coates, who recently donated £250,000 to the Labour party, which is the largest group on the no-overall-control council.

● SPEAKING his mind has proved a bad move for Swansea Labour councillor Des Thomas, who faces suspension for opposing a new Welsh language primary school. Cllr Thomas reckons £6m is money ill-spent when the city's other Victorian schools are crumbling and there's little money for repairs. But the fact that he said so during a planning meeting could get him banned, even though he never cast a vote. The city council standards committee has accused him of the appalling crime of "predetermination". It says Cllr Thomas breached its code of conduct by making up his mind before the plans were discussed in committee. "Predetermination" is becoming a familiar way to deal with councillors who rock the boat on sensitive planning matters. Cllr Thomas faces suspension for a month and, as the *Eye* went to press, was taking legal advice over a possible appeal.

BOURNE AGAIN

ONE of the big issues in May's council elections in Bournemouth was that of rampant overdevelopment, with out-of-scale blocks of flats being built willy-nilly in the former gardens of houses in the resort's leafy streets. Voters blamed the Lib Dems and swept the Tories back into power.

One of the new Conservative councillors was Alex Adams, whose campaign leaflets vowed that he would "fight overdevelopment" wherever it occurred. As far as the voters were concerned, Adams was the owner of a day nursery called Little Gems. No doubt shortage of time and space prevented him from letting on that he is also the director of a property company called Sandbourne Developments, which is applying to demolish two Edwardian villas in the Charminster district and replace them with... two blocks of 14 flats!

SCARBOROUGH AFFAIR

MORE THAN two years after the *Eye* reported Scarborough council's disastrous and illegal sea defences scheme, which went more than £13m over-budget, the red-faced council has turned to m'learned friends to try to recoup some of its taxpayers' millions.

Scarborough is to sue civil engineering giant High-Point Rendel (H-PR), illegally appointed to carry out a massive coastal defence scheme estimated at £28m, which ended up costing £51m (*Eyes* passim).

The unlawful tendering and breaches of regulations that paved the way for H-PR's lucrative dip into council coffers have been echoed to an alarming extent on the Isle of Wight, which took on Scarborough's cast-off environmental services chief, Derek Rowell, who had been responsible for managing the scheme.

Rowell is now one of seven Isle of Wight officials suspended during inquiries over H-PR's contract for the £13m Undercliff Drive coastal road scheme on the IoW. Two external reports have found there was illegal tendering and failure to follow council regulations. Rowell, legal eagle John Lawson and finance chief Paul Wilkinson all face disciplinary proceedings.

Latest casualty is geologist Dr Robin McInnes OBE, the council's coastal manager, who resigned to "spend more time with his family" an hour after being interviewed by the committee investigating the affair. One matter he may have been asked about was whether he had ever declared an interest in his employers' dealings with H-PR – given that he is a pal of H-PR director and fellow Isle of Wight resident, Dr Alan Clark.

● GENIUSES at Copeland district council in Cumbria had a great wheeze to beat the smoking ban. They removed the glass panes from 20 bus shelters, thereby rendering them "unenclosed" spaces where it was still legal to have a fag. The trouble with making bus shelters "unenclosed" is that it exposes waiting passengers to wind and rain. Following a barrage of complaints from drenched travellers, the glass has now gone back – with the addition of stern "no smoking" signs, of course.

"Of course, back in the '80s it wasn't actually illegal to be in league with the Devil"

Sir Simon Milton

In Rotten Boroughs (issue 1165, August 2006) we said that the District Auditor was investigating the conduct of Sir Simon Milton, the leader of Westminster City Council, to look into allegations that he had been instrumental in Westminster's decision to allow Shirley Porter to pay only £12.3m out of the £42m she owed to the council following the decision of the House of Lords on the "Homes for Votes" scandal of the 1980s.

That report was incorrect. In fact, Sir Simon was not the subject of any investigation by the District Auditor. The District Auditor's investigation into Westminster's settlement with Shirley Porter, following objections to its 2003/2004 accounts, has now concluded with the publication of a Public Interest Report (15 March 2007: www.audit-commission.gov.uk). The District Auditor makes no criticism of Sir Simon.

In his report, the District Auditor considers the mediation process which led to Westminster's settlement with Shirley Porter in April 2004. We accept that Sir Simon was not involved in that process.

We apologise to Sir Simon for any embarrassment caused by the error in our earlier article.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

LOSING AN OLD FRIEND IS ALWAYS SO PAINFUL
HOLD IT TOGETHER, MAN! JUST THINK OF THE GREAT TIMES YOU SPENT TOGETHER. IT'S WHAT HE WOULD HAVE WANTED...
IT'S JUST SO HARD SAYING GOODBYE TO A MUCH LOVED BUT OBSOLETE COMPUTER
PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW...

NOOKS and CORNERS

EARLIER this year the Tate Gallery celebrated the genius of William Hogarth, perhaps England's greatest and most loved painter, with a major exhibition. Meanwhile the government assures us that more money than ever is being invested in National Health Service hospitals.

These facts may seem disconnected, but they unhappily coincide at St Bartholemew's Hospital in London where, scandalously, the great murals by Hogarth on the Grand Staircase to the Great Hall are threatened by water coming through the 18th century roof – *and nothing is being done about it.*

"Barts" in Smithfield is the oldest and greatest hospital in London. It was founded by Rahere in 1123 to fulfil a vow to build a hospital for the poor as well as an Augustinian priory – part of whose church survives as St Bartholemew-the-Great. It was refounded by Henry VIII in 1546 after the dissolution of the monasteries.

In the 18th century the hospital was rebuilt on an orderly plan largely to the design of James Gibbs, the architect of St Martin-in-the-Fields. It was for the north block of this ambitious scheme, intended for administration and containing the grand Court Room, that Hogarth painted his two murals – of The Good Samaritan and Christ at the Pool of Bethseda – using Biblical themes to illustrate the charitable work of the institution.

And so, for more than 800 years, St Bartholemew's Hospital ministered to the sick and poor until the Conservative government of John Major came to power. In 1993 the Tomlinson Report into the London health service decided there were too many hospitals in central London and recommended Bart's for closure. The government then decided Bart's must either be closed, merged with other hospitals or became a small specialist hospital. This provoked massive opposition and a petition that the hospital remain was signed by 1m people.

In 1998, the Labour government decided to reprieve Barts and recommended it should survive as a specialist cancer and cardiac hospital. In 1999, its management was transferred to the Barts & The London NHS Trust. But nothing much happened.

Despite the government insisting in 2002 that Barts' future as "a centre of medical excellence" was secure, a plan for modernising it – by public finance initiative, with Skanska as the "approved developer" – stalled.

Last January an adjournment debate on the future of the hospital was held in the Commons because the Department of Health had commissioned a "fundamental review" of the Barts and the London NHS Trust PFI on the grounds of affordability and need. In this debate, Mark Field, MP for the Cities of London and Westminster, complained: "For a decade and more, the departments of this most respected hospital have been consistently undermined by political uncertainty. Today, the anxiety levels have become almost unbearable... because of the imminent demise of Barts as a leading London hospital."

Another casualty of this disgraceful uncertainty would seem to have been the historic buildings of the hospital. Because the roof of the North Wing in particular needs attention, not only the Hogarths but the whole magnificent Great Hall or Court Room – one of London's grandest but least known rooms – are in danger from water. Because of this danger, the World Monuments Fund became involved and tried to persuade the hospital to set up a separate building preservation trust to look after this building. Donors were willing to help raise the £10m or so needed. But, with limited cash available, the managers of the NHS Trust were reluctant to divert a penny which might be spent on patient care and refused to negotiate the transfer of the lease of the North Wing to the separate trust for a limited period so that restoration could be carried out. As a result a $36,000 grant secured by the WMF towards a survey and conservation plan had to be returned. The fund has since pulled out, defeated by NHS bureaucracy and negativity. Meanwhile the water continues to drip through.

But there is hope. Patricia Hewitt is no longer Health Secretary; the PFI plan for Barts and the London Hospital is to go ahead; and new managers have taken over at Barts. Perhaps they will display more public spiritedness and commonsense.

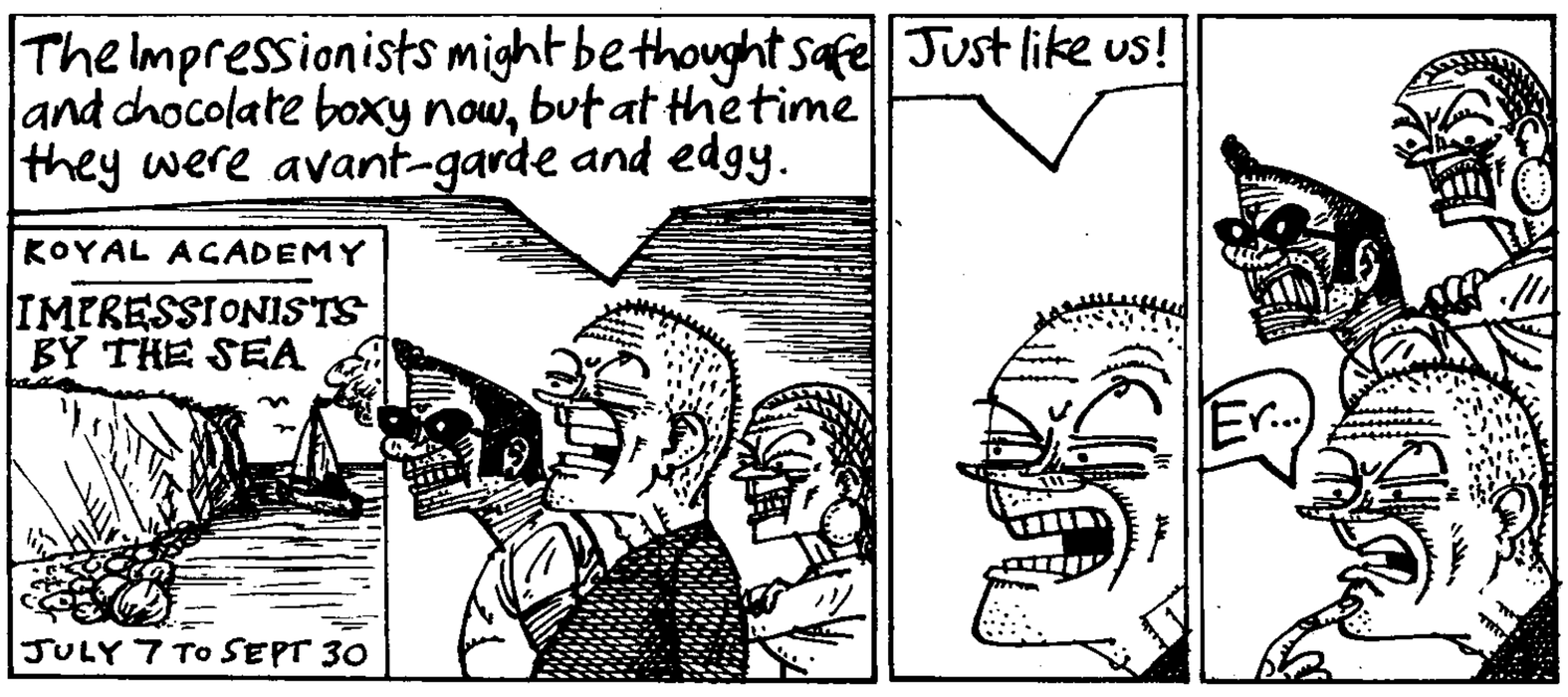
ANOTHER story of blinkered lunacy comes from Scotland where the Church of Scotland's Panel of Arbiters has recommended uniting three parishes in Govan in Glasgow, resulting in the closure of two churches.

One of these is Govan Old, a grand and distinguished building of the 1880s by Sir Robert Rowand Anderson (architect of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery), which contains Early Christian tombstones and sculpture which were once in the ancient churchyard. It is a decision greeted "with dismay" by the Church's own advisory body, the Central Committee for Church Art and Architecture, for Govan Old stands on the earliest Christian site in Glasgow, dating from the time of St Constantine, king and martyr – ie the 6th century. That such a building on such a hallowed site could be proposed for closure in favour of New Govan Church, a second-rate and unremarkable structure of 1873, suggests that the anti-historical Wahaabi tendency in Evangelical Christianity has taken over in the Church of Scotland as it has in many parishes of the Church of England.

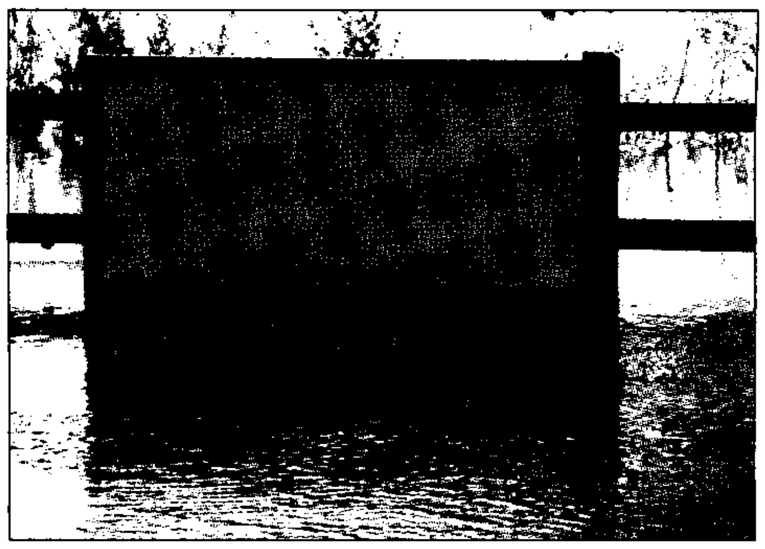
'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


The Impressionists might be thought safe and chocolate boxy now, but at the time they were avant-garde and edgy.
ROYAL ACADEMY
IMPRESSIONISTS BY THE SEA
JULY 7 TO SEPT 30
Just like us!
Er...

I-SPY *Stafford*



Submitted by Chris Hamlett. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

KEITH BURSTEIN is a composer – not one of great repute, but with a talent for self-publicity at any rate. You may have seen him on BBC Four the other week denouncing the music world for its reluctance to perform his scores, which he modestly described as "ravishingly beautiful".

Denunciation, though, is his claim to fame. A while ago he set up the "Hecklers", a troupe of fogeyish composers driven by the failure of their own tuneful ditties to attack the work of more successful if less tuneful colleagues. They were notorious for booing a 1999 Royal Opera performance of Harrison Birtwistle's *Gawain* – until Alfred Brendel got out of his seat and told them to shut up.

Burstein, meanwhile, has been engaged on a succession of pieces notable for their political opportunism: a requiem for victims of the Marchioness disaster, a meditation on the Holocaust, an In Memoriam John Smith MP... culminating in *Manifest Destiny*, a mini-opera about Guantanamo Bay that played on the Edinburgh Fringe in 2005.

By general consent, none of this mighty oeuvre was of much merit. But few dared say so. Burstein had already won £8,000 in damages after the *Times* claimed that his heckling had "interrupted" Birtwistle's work. Then he set about the *Evening Standard* which had witheringly dismissed the Guantanamo opera as "a trite affair... horribly leaden and unmusical", adding that "the idea that there is anything heroic about suicide bombers is, frankly, a grievous insult".

Burstein again rushed to law, arguing that the review set him up as a terrorist sympathiser. Perhaps he'd never discussed the plot with *Manifest Destiny's* librettist Dic Edwards. "Leila [the would-be suicide bomber] is clearly our heroine and we praise her both as a fighter for freedom and, subsequently, for her courage to finally renounce violence," he told *Theatre in Wales*. Elsewhere he explained to Reuters that "we wanted to show that potentially we are all suicide bombers if there is a cause... If people probed beyond their initial aversion to the bombers they would find common human motivations and gain greater understanding."

Last autumn in the high court Mr Justice Eady refused the *Standard's* application to strike out the action, saying that the case had enough merit to go before a jury.

However, Eady's decision has now been overturned by the court of appeal, reasserting the right of fair comment and leaving Burstein with a bill for legal costs that will probably touch £100,000.

Burstein says he isn't finished yet and has been muttering about the House of Lords. Meanwhile, the *Evening Standard* critic was sufficiently emboldened by the appeal court judgment to comment: "I dread to think what his response would have been if he had heard my privately expressed views on the work".

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Breaking cover

Sir,

Discounting the publication of the photo of a scandalously unelected PM, your cover (Eye 1188) is tasteless in at least three respects, which must be a record. Can I have £10 for spotting this? (No. Ed.)

Yours observantly,
ADRIAN MANN,

Doncaster, S. Yorks.

Mine of information

Sir,

What an inspired solution to the landfill problem (Letters, 1188) – which particular mine would Anthony Cadman suggest we start filling with waste? Wheal Jane perhaps, where 50 million litres of acidic minewater was released into the Fal estuary in 1992 or any one of the numerous abandoned coal mines causing pollution in the North East. Whilst the former brick pits, being situated in clay, were reasonably good at containing toxic landfill leachate, abandoned mines would certainly not be. Still, if the streams and groundwater are already contaminated by acid mine drainage, perhaps it won't matter if there is a bit of extra pollution from leachate. However, I shall continue to reduce, re-use and recycle (perhaps I should cancel my subscription in order to do this).

Yours hydro-geologically,
HEATHER STREETLY,

Via email.

Loyal to the croon?

Sir,

With the exception of staunch Unionists, I doubt that many Scots would talk about having a "wee gabby with Liz tha' second", most would remind you that our current monarch is of course the first Queen Elizabeth Scotland has had. In fact I think there is a song that starts "How can there be a Lizzie twa...?"

Does the Broon-ites perhaps require a Scottish consultant in much the same way that the Archers has an agricultural consultant?

Yours faithfully,
LAURA POTTINGER,

Via email.

Long lost brother

Ted

Ed

Glenn

Sir,

Re the Miliband Twins. It's not generally known, but there's a third brother, Glenn, a musician high-flyer recently posted missing!

Best wishes,
BEN STEAD,

London SE16.

An official at the Cabinet Office, the Government department responsible for the running of the Civil Service, said: "I can't say there is a blanket policy on duvet days yet,"

Sunday Telegraph

Pretentious? Lui?

Sir,

Some names – you know how it goes – explode from the page, even an unjustified one such as you so quaintly cling to. These names have a particular charge, and register with all the force of a suspicious package in the Palace grounds. With me, it's Zappa, Sartre, Lorca, Hicks and Baudelaire – not perhaps as mainstream as Welsh, Spears, Goody, Lloyd Webber and Emin, mais chacun son goût...

How incendiary, then, to have Charlie B detonate, not once but twice, in Eye 1186. The close proximity of the references only added – naturellement *– to the impact. Location? Pseud's Corner. Question? Why should the author of* Les Fleurs du Mal *serve merely as a marker for pseudery? Aren't, for example, Andy and Tracey more suited to falseness and pomposity?*

Of course, if referencing the nouveaux célèbres *were a ticket to your beloved* Rendez-vous des Bas-bleus, *perhaps your organ would end up so engorged that there would be precious (sorry!) little room for your other excellent* divertissements *!*

Yours, high in dudgeon and culture,
IAN FALLER,

Glasgow.

Lookalike

Crun

Friel

Sir,

Judging from a recent photograph of famed writer Brian Friel, he is slowly changing into one of the creations of Spike Milligan, another Irish man of letters. The resemblance to the Telegoon incarnation of Henry Crun is uncanny.

Yours etc,
AL McHOGAN,

Via email.

Advance repulsed

Sir,

Re Worstseller Chart, Eye 1187. Thanks very much indeed for awarding me such a marvellous advance (£50,000!!!) for the Vintage edition of my first novel, Descent. *Having no friends or relations in the press or publishing business, you can imagine that I was terribly surprised that you decided to give me such a generous figure.*

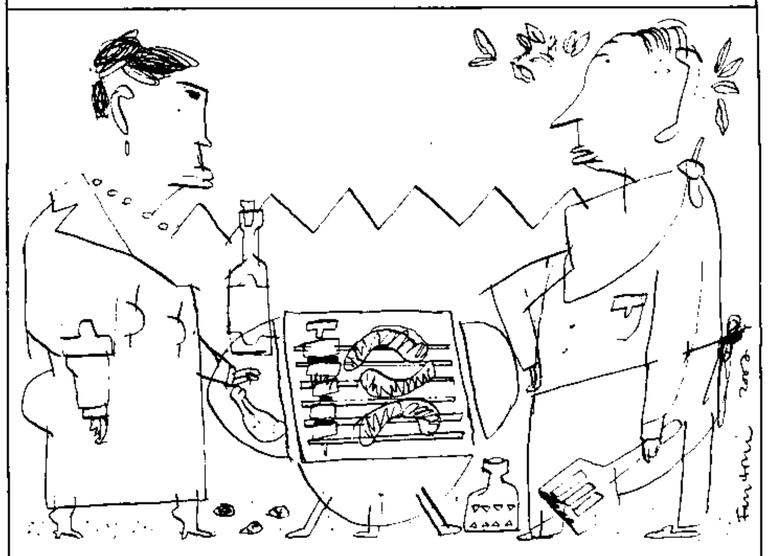
I have heard that in some people's bank accounts, £35,000 more or less is really neither here nor there. Very sadly, in mine, this is not the case.

SABRINA BROADBENT
(Teacher and worst-selling author),

Via email.

● The advance was reported on the Publishers Marketplace as a "good deal" – upwards of £50,000, according to the website's guidelines. As details are supplied by agents or occasionally publishers, it would appear that somebody somewhere, but not Ms Broadbent, has been exaggerating their figures in order to look good. Ed.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Shouldn't we move the barbeque to the end of the garden so the smoke won't annoy our neighbours?"

Bum note

Sir,

Re Music & Musicians (1188).

It is a pity that Lunchtime O'Boulez cannot give a full and more focused picture regarding Liverpool's forthcoming '08 European Capital of Culture events before expressing his opinion.

Firstly, Cllr Joe Anderson is not the leader of the city's council, rather leader of the minority Labour Party group.

Secondly, it is rather ironic, given the title of the column and its author's name that the writer fails to omit completely the outstanding contribution the city's internationally recognised orchestra is playing in the celebrations. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (RLPO) has not only secured the services of Vladimir Ashkenazy and Sir Simon Rattle as Artists Laureate for 2008 with the former also conducting the European Union Youth Orchestra in the city, one of only two concerts in this country, the other being in London but also, inter alia, the services of Sir Andrew Davis and Sir Charles Mackerras together with other highly acclaimed soloists such as Bryn Terfel. The RLPO will also perform Britten's seminal "War Requiem" in Liverpool and Cologne. Additionally, the orchestra's governing society (the RLPS) has also secured the funding for 30 new commissions, including works by Sir John Tavener and Karl Jenkins.

Other major events include the first British exhibition of the work of Gustav Klimt at Tate Liverpool and 11 new works of art commissioned by the Liverpool Culture Company, including "An Audience With Shankly". The latter no doubt more to Cllr Anderson's taste, unless of course he is an Evertonian!

Whilst I much enjoy reading the views expressed by Private Eye every fortnight, I do expect its coverage to be accurate and balanced.

Yours,
KENNETH DUVALL,

Reading, Berks.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

I read that Salman Rushdie and his twenty-years-younger wife Padma Lakshmi are divorcing "at her request". This is clearly a sad day for Mr Rushdie and I wonder whether you have any pictures that show the correct way for an elderly gentleman to hold on to his much younger, Asian partner?

Yours, etc,
PADDY SPENCER,

Via email.

Lookalike

Willis

Fort

Sir,

Has anyone ever seen Matthew Fort (Grauniad food and drink editor) and Bruce Willis in the same room? I'm sure they are the same person.

Yours,
DUDLEY TURNER,
Via email.

Flag of convenience

Sir,

Yet another incredibly unfunny cartoon by RGJ ("EU-phemisms", Eye 1188), but this time even more pig-ignorant than usual. Perhaps you would take him to one side and gently explain that the Council of Europe has, er, absolutely nothing at all to do with the European Union.

Yours,
P.Z. TEMPERTON,
London SE1.

● Sorry my cartoon upset such an obviously charming fellow. The Council of Europe is not part of the EU, but it has the same flag and anthem, and a cursory look at its website (like what I've just done) shows that it claims to be part of a "shared political project". But obviously the joke about us sending our discredited, unelectable politicians to Europe doesn't hold for the EU. We send our popular heroes who avoid scandal, like Peter Mandelson, and our election winners, like Neil Kinnock and Chris Patten. Oink! RGJ.

No go logo

Sir,

I have noticed the ironic fact that "THE LONDON OLYMPIC GAMES" is an anagram of "MEN PLAN SHIT COMEDY LOGO".

Best wishes,
TONY BLADES ("STAY BLONDE"),
Birkenhead, Wirral.

Dead observant

Sir,

Just another pedantry but as a Funeral Director I did notice that twice recently in cartoons relating to funerals the coffin is being carried head first instead of feet first.

HARRY KNIGHT,
Via email.

SOLUTIONS

"Greene King's preparations for the ban have stretched over a number of years, gradually building 'smoking solutions' into developments" – *beer gardens*

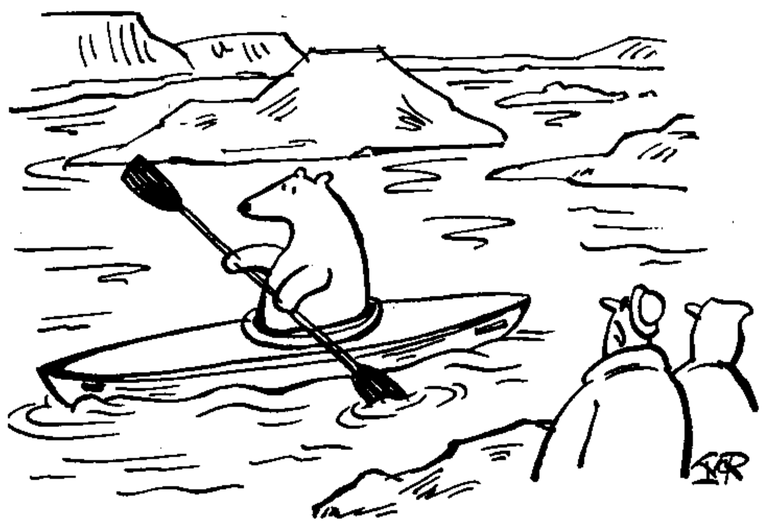
"Passim People focus on providing straightforward cost efficient workforce solutions" – *employment agency*

"Car Builder Solutions" – *car parts*

"Thermosafe: Temperature Assurance Solutions" – *insulated containers*

"Oxbridge Academic Solutions: the UK's leading provider of 1st Class and 2:1 custom-written essays and dissertations" – *cheating*

All submitted by readers



"They're already beginning to adapt"

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"A win is a win... except of course when it's not a win, then it's not a win."
VENUS WILLIAMS, BBC
(Keith Waterhouse)

"He [Rafael Nadal] is cocky, but in a humble way."
JOHN McENROE, BBC
(Richard Bready)

"I can honestly guarantee that if this game was being played in England it wouldn't take place in this stadium."
TIM VICKERY (in Venezuela), Radio 5 Live
(Rod Edge)

"We are in a situation where banks are literally throwing money at us."
JASMINE BIRTLES, BBC News 24
(Robin Roper)

"Hopefully, by next year our swimmers will be competing on a level playing field."
BBC Midlands Today
(Simon Gregory)

Country sports

Sir,

It has long been held that a smart set of wheels helps when "pulling the birds". By any chance do you have any pictorial evidence of such an assertion?

DAVE LLOYD,
North Wales.

Blame the parents

Sir,

Mary-Ann Sieghart's children may be very clever (Hackwatch, Eye 1188) but they're not exactly original. Witty geeks have for years been wearing T-shirts with the slogans "Physics Rules", "Biology (or Botany) Grows on You" and "Geology Rocks", which is even more amusing - and accurate - than "Chemistry Rocks".

The children may have learnt how to recycle material from their mother, of course.

Best wishes,
DAVID JONES,
Via email.

Census sensibility

Sir,

Re Mr Warner's letter about Kosovo (Eye 1188): "[Kosovo] was part of Serbia well before the formation of the Yugoslav federation in 1918." Quite so. Serbia had invaded and occupied it all of six years before, in 1912. Prior to 1912, Kosovo had last been part of a Serbian state in 1459. On that basis, perhaps Gascony is an integral part of the UK because it was ruled by English kings until 1452.

Kosovo acquired an Albanian majority "...20 or more years ago". Really? In 1921 the new Yugoslav unitary state conducted its first census. Like all such events in the Eastern and Central Europe of that era, its results favoured the dominant nationality, in this case the Serbs. Even so, the Yugoslav census-takers had to accept that two-thirds of the people of Kosovo were Albanian.

Mr Warren refers to a mass migration of Albanians into Serbia (presumably into Kosovo) in the 20th century. Depending on which Serb propaganda you are reading, the migration took place either between the two world wars, or in the 1950s and 1960s. Either way, the migration was missed by demographers until it was invented by Milosevic's PR chappies in the 1990s.

Please don't think that I give a monkey's about Albanians or Serbs (or Mr Warren for that matter) but as a clapped-out history teacher I do like to see a good prejudice rooted in fact rather than myth. Don't you?

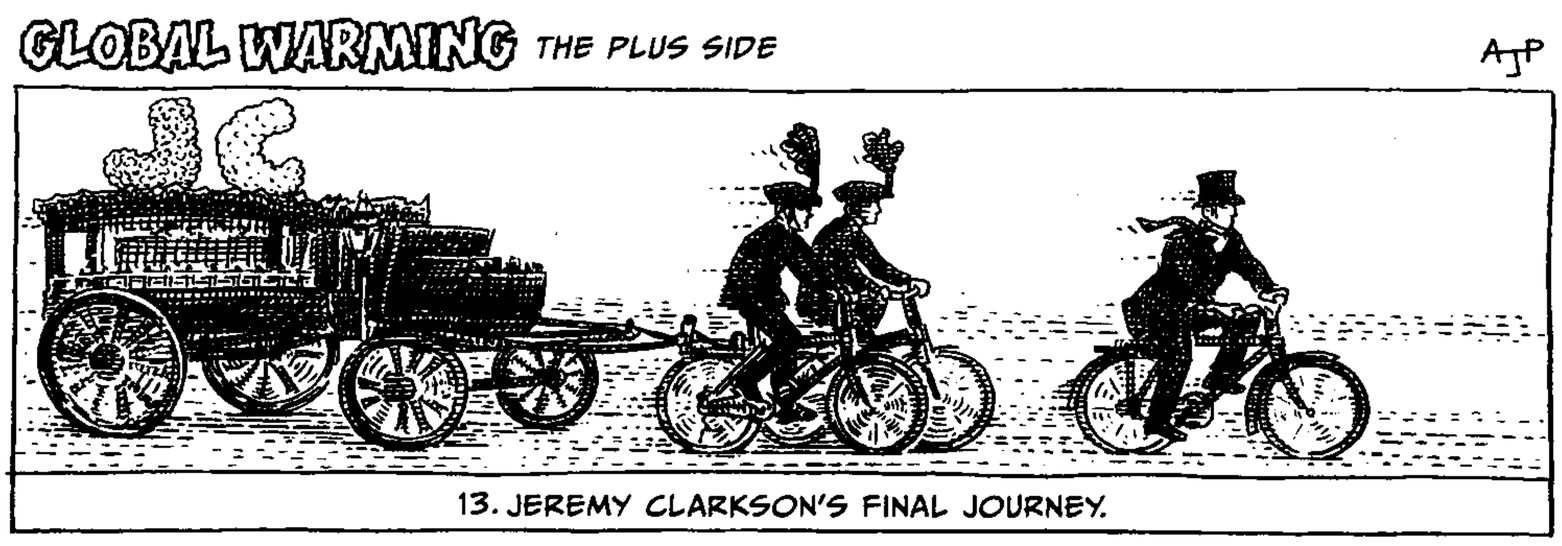
Yours,
J KELLY,
St Helens.

Berk speak

Sir,

Please bin the tedious Birtspeak 2.0 spot. It's not hilariously badly written corporatese, it's just stuff your hack doesn't understand. For instance, Birtspeak 2.0 in issue 1187 was a bog-standard commercial job ad for an information architect. Look up "information architect" on Google if you aren't sure what one is. (You may have to switch your computer on first.)

SIMON McGREGOR,
Via email.



Letter from **Dublin**

from Our Own Correspondent

TIMES may be changing in some parts of the island of Ireland, but in Dublin we have the comfortable familiarity of the same politicians and their dodgy scams.

The May elections gave Fianna Fáil 42 percent of the vote and, after some heavy horse-trading to form a new coalition government, a new term as Taosieach for Bertie Ahern. Since his previous partners, the Progressive Democrats, were trounced, Bertie had to try his luck with independents and Greens.

While Green party leader Trevor Sargent led his party through the negotiations, he fell on his sacrificial sword even before the blood had dried on the FF/Green agreement, honouring his promise to resign as leader if such a coalition was formed.

Other Greens were more pragmatic, believing that any opportunity to join the government was a good thing. However, Green John Gormley may regret his haste. Recently appointed as minister for the environment, heritage and local government, he now faces a big "green" dilemma courtesy of his predecessor, FF's Dick Roche, who signed an order to continue building the M3 motorway near the Hill of Tara, in an "up yours" gesture before leaving office.

TaraWatch, a charitable body that monitors archaeological excavations around Tara, has reported two new major discoveries, one being a new "henge". Although the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 2004 covers such unexpected finds, Gormley may find his hands tied due to Roche's actions.

One person who may be back in the loving arms of Fianna Fáil soon is Mayo West TD Beverly Flynn, who has been expelled twice. The last time was in 2004 when Bertie expressed strong disapproval in relation to Flynn's failed libel action against our national broadcaster, RTE.

Flynn (when she was Beverly Cooper Flynn) worked as a financial adviser for National Irish Bank, where she advised clients about how to, um, evade taxes. But she "was just following bank policy" and was "a scape-goat", said RTE last month.

Unfortunately she lost her libel case big-time, owing €2.8m in legal fees. Last week RTE got tired waiting and began bankruptcy proceedings in the high court, so Bev decided to tackle our constitutional prohibition on bankrupts holding political office. Suddenly, however, RTE accepted her partial promise of €1.2-1.3m to resolve everything and Flynn quietly dropped her constitutional challenge.

As for Bertie, it looks as if money worries are coming back to haunt him too. We have lots of questions about his bank details, such as why he didn't appear to have a bank account when he was finance minister (and blank cheque signer) under disgraced former Taoiseach Charles Haughey in the early 1990s. Bertie was also given £8,000 in handouts from some business men in Manchester, while his former landlord paid for renovations and stamp duty for Bertie's rented (now owned) house.

As a former accountant, one wouldn't expect him to have any problems answering all or any of these queries – but he does. Indeed, he looks like a deer caught in the headlights whenever more information is leaked from the Mahon Tribunal, before which he is expected to appear at the end of the month, the day after his ex-girlfriend will hopefully answer some of these pressing questions (unless there's yet another delay and Bertie, aka the Teflon Taoiseach, survives). Bertie learned well from Haughey. Though we admire his "ordinary man on the street" act, he remains an enigma.

So we wait to see whether the Greens can rescue their principles with Tara; whether Flynn's misdemeanours will be forgiven; and whether Bertie will remain virtually untouched by the Mahon Tribunal queries. No doubt Eamon de Valera, who preached integrity and disdained coalitions, would be spinning in his grave if the stake in his heart wasn't pinning him down!

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Prince Philip is a God to my people," Chief Jack Naiva told reporters in the remote village of Yaohnanen on the South Pacific island of Vanuatu, "and we have worshipped him for fifty years. We believe he is the son of an ancient spirit, Kaka, who lives on the nearby island of Tanna, and that he is immortal. We don't know where England is, but we know Prince Philip, son of Kaka lives there, and that he is the Messiah. We cannot see him, but sometimes we can hear his voice."

The people of Yaohnanen have been worshipping Prince Philip since the 1950s,

when Bible stories told by Christian missionaries became confused with displays of royal deference made by the British colonial authorities on what was then part of the New Hebrides. "The Divine Duke of Edinburgh," Chief Naiva continued, "is the fulfilment of an ancient prophecy that a Tanna man would venture far away in search of a powerful woman to marry. Over the years, he has sent us three framed portraits to worship, including this one of him holding a traditional pig-killing club. We used to have letters from him too, but humidity and nibbling mice have destroyed them.

"We celebrate his birthday every year on June 10th, but the celebrations will only be complete if Prince Philip himself turns up. You must tell him that I'm getting old, and I want him to come and visit me before I die. If he can't come, perhaps he could send something to help us. A Land Rover or some money would be nice." *(New Zealand Herald, 19/2/07. Spotter: D. Kendon)*

– ● –

● *"We have achieved good progress in standardising English translations on signs," Liu Yang of the Foreign Affairs Office told a press conference in Beijing, "but more needs to be done. Menus are being checked for items like 'fried crap,' 'acid food,' or 'Big Bowl Fresh Immerse Miscellaneous Germ.' And 6,530 road signs have already been replaced, including the red neon sign that used to say 'Dongda Hospital for Anus and Intestine Disease.' That now says 'Dongda Proctology Hospital'."*

The Chinese capital is replacing thousands of poorly-translated signs ahead of the 2008 Olympics, but many British visitors lament their disappearance. "It's too bad," said student Ian McCulloch, "because they give the city a little more character. It's almost worth a walk down the street, just to see 'pubic toilets,' or 'harsh browns,' or a wet-floor sign reading 'To take notice of safe: The slippery very crafty'."

But Mr Liu insisted that the changes were necessary. "We must replace the signs on handicapped toilets that say 'deformed men,' and the meeting place for ethnic minorities that is currently signposted as 'Racist Park.' Some of these translations are really problematic and not so polite." (Bangkok Post, 13/4/07. Spotter: Ean Cowley)

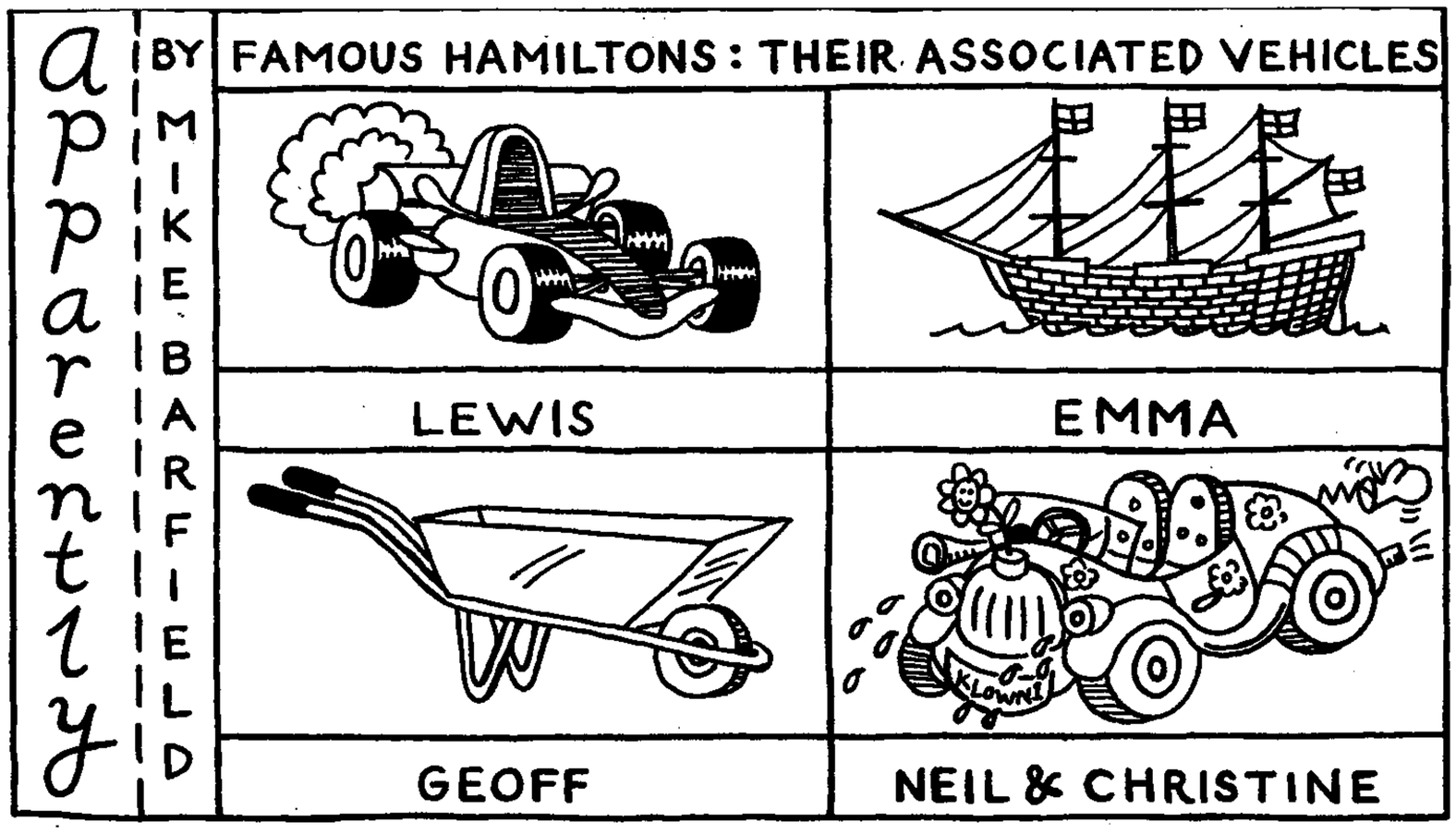
– ● –

● "I can confirm that numerous complaints about the Bible have been received," a spokeswoman for the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority (TELA) told reporters in Hong Kong. "In fact, as of noon on Wednesday, we'd had 838 of them. The thrust of all the complaints is that the Bible is obscene, and that different parts are offensive to readers. I cannot give precise details, but references to acts of violence, rape, incest and cannibalism have been cited."

The complaints are thought to have been sparked by a local Chinese-language website which has been campaigning for the Bible to be reclassified as an indecent publication. "The Bible makes one tremble," it stated, "and its sexual content far exceeds that of any respectable book. TELA should make it illegal for people under 18 years of age to purchase such filth, and it should only be sold at all when wrapped with a statutory warning."

However, the Rev. Wu Chi-wai defended the book, saying, "If there is rape or bestiality mentioned in the Bible, that doesn't mean it encourages those activities. It's just common sense." *(Mail & Guardian [Zambia], 25/5/07. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne).*

apparently BY MIKE BARFIELD



TORY REVEALED AS LABOUR SUPPORTER

by Our Political Staff **Simon Hogwarts**

THERE WAS huge embarrassment in the Conservative party last night when it was revealed that their candidate for Prime Minister was in fact a major supporter of Tony Blair.

Only two weeks ago, it was reported, David Cameron attended a function at the House of Commons where he went out of his way to encourage his supporters to give Mr Blair a standing ovation.

Tony Lite

Film showed a beaming Cameron clapping and cheering the Labour Prime Minister, and further research has shown that Mr Cameron once described himself to friends as "the heir to Blair."

Said a furious Tory backbencher Sir Simon Hefferlump, "Cameron is just an opportunist who has no real interest in politics and will say anything to get elected. And he's not even Asian."

QUEEN OF PHOTOGRAPHERS FLIES INTO RAGE

by Our Royal Staff **Tina Brown**

HER Royal Highness Princess Anne of Leibowitz lost her temper yesterday when a silly old woman she was trying to photograph refused to do as she was asked.

A spokesman for the Princess said, "Annie is a very gracious lady, but she is not used to this lack of courtesy from one of her subjects.

"The protocol on these occasions is that the subject defers to the photographer. Men are expected to bow and women are expected to take off their crowns."

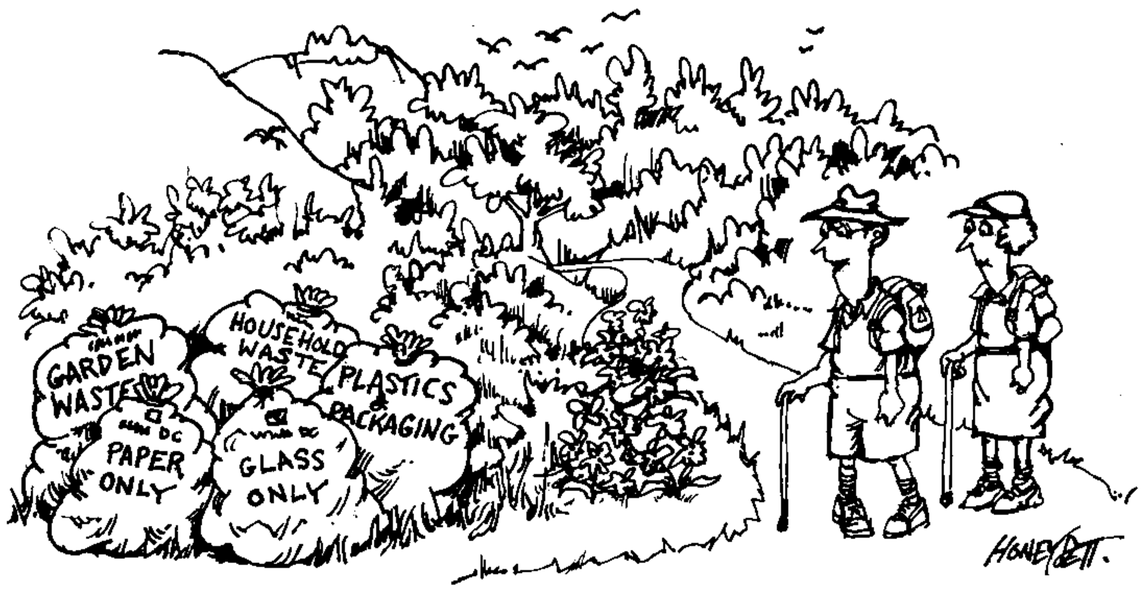
Queenie Fit

"On this occasion, the old woman stepped over the line of what is permissible and the Princess was perfectly entitled to explode with rage and put the silly old woman firmly in her place."

BBC Apologises Over Mixed-Up Footage

THE Director General of the BBC, Mr Mark Thompson, today apologised for an embarrassing mix up of two pieces of film footage.

He told reporters, "In the first sequence, the controller of the BBC, Mr Peter Fincham, is seen walking into his job. In the second, he is seen leaving it hurriedly after being sacked. We deeply regret that the BBC put these scenes in the wrong order."



"Well, at least they dumped it in the appropriate bags"

BORIS PLAN FOR LONDON IN FULL

1. Blimey! Big place, London... Bit bigger than Henley-on-Thames but more or less the same sort of chap – river running through, shops, houses, lots of tourists...

2. One thing that is different is the underground railway thing! Haven't been on it yet because can't get my bike down the escalator. Sort that out pronto! In fact it'll be one of my big points – that'll knock Red Ken for six! "Bikes on the Tube." Yes, we could all cycle down the tunnels, damn sight safer than the roads, eh? You see, Ken hasn't thought of *that*, has he? Too busy sucking up to the commies and the gay chaps and so on...

3. One problem about London, though. Full of bloody Londoners! Self-pitying whingers, the lot of them. Even worse than Liverpool and Portsmouth. Always moaning about the tubes or the buses or the pigeons. Poor old Red Ken.

APOLOGY

Mr Boris Johnson would like to make it clear that he has the highest regard for the people of London and is second to none in his admiration for their dignity and courage *(as dictated by David Cameron).*

4. Now there was I? London, yes... The really good thing about London is all the top totty from all over the world! Cripes! Especially when the weather's a bit hot and they're not wearing much! Enough to make a chap fall off his bike if he's not careful!

Aaaarghhh!!

The Church of The Latter-Day Morons

A Message To All Mankind

Greetings, people from Everywhereland. As supreme Moron of the Latter-Day Church, I bring you tidings of war and peace – peace in war-torn Iraqland and war in peaceful Iranland!

My mission is, as always, to bring democracility and freedomitude to all persons on the globe!

But these delicate blooms, for blooms they be, require constant nurturing. And each morning, as the sun comes up, I go out a-nurturing these flowers of democritude and freedility, armed only with my watering can and my trusty silver Colt 45 with the ivory handle signed by the great Clint Eastwood himself. 'Cos, y'know, the bad guys can run, but they can't hide – not when the surge is coming – no, surgee! There are three hundred thousand men in my posse, and if this tin badge on my chest means anything, it means we're withdrawing from Iraqland now that our victory has been achieved.

And let the Iranlanders beware! As High Noon approaches, we'll be riding in there too and riding out again real soon!!

Yippee Yi-yay! Ya Hoo!

Yours in the Lord,
Rev. Dubya Bush

The world's greatest spiritual leader – fighting for peace in a neighbourhood near you

TORIES UNVEIL SECRET WEAPON

by Our Political Staff **Sir Peter O'Bore**

THE new-look Conservative Party today took a further huge stride towards winning the next election with the reappearance on the political scene off their former leader Iain Duncan Cough.

The so-called 'quiet man', who led the Tories for a few weeks in 2001 before having to retire after developing a nasty cough, has made one of the most sensational come-backs British politics has ever known.

For some years it was generally believed that Cough was dead.

But in reality he had withdrawn from the world in order to develop a revolutionary single policy which alone would be enough to catapult the Tories back into power.

Cough's plan was deceptively simple. Put 7p on the price of every pint of beer and this would be so popular in pubs across the land that 'Dave' Cameron would be carried shoulder high into 10 Downing Street by a vast array of grateful binge-drinkers.

Iain Drunken Cough

In his first press conference since he was sacked as leader, Cough spelled out his master plan for binding all sections of the community together.

"If we whack up the tax on beer," the quiet man whispered, "the whole country will unite in thinking that we are completely mad."

Duncan Cough is 74.

"Bloody Tories"

Letters *to the Editor*

The Smoking Ban

SIR – Wherever I go in London these days, I find the streets packed with people engaged in the filthy habit of smoking.

Isn't it time there was a law to force these people only to smoke indoors, so that they do not inconvenience the rest of us with their disgusting, noxious, repulsive smoke?

Nick O'Tine
By email.

●Do you agree with Nick O'Tine? Or do you not smoke? Or perhaps you did once and now that you've given up you think smokers should be strung up because it's the only language they understand? We're not interested in your views but we've got a lot of space to fill up so please email us at once at readitontheblog@desperate.rubbish.telegraph.co.uk

JUDGES NO LONGER TO WEAR TROUSERS

by Our Legal Correspondent **Harry Flashman**

IN THE biggest revolution in legal history, the Lord Chancellor has lifted the centuries-old requirement that judges must wear trousers when travelling on the train.

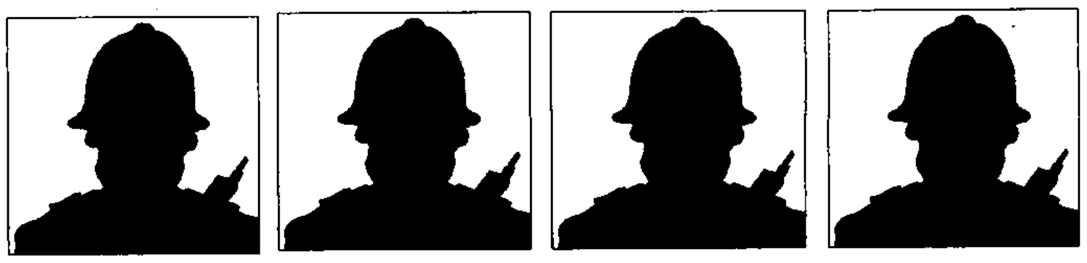
Justice Cockle-Out

In future, judges will be allowed to sit on the 8.13 to Waterloo wearing only their underpants so long as the said underpants conform to the Judicial Undergarment Propriety Code *(see Calvin v. Klein 1897)*.

Judges have generally welcomed the move. Said one, Justice Sir Ephraim Raincoat, "Seeing a judge all dressed up in trousers can sometimes be very intimidating for the public and they feel ill at ease. The new relaxed dress code should create a more informal atmosphere on the train where the judge is no longer a forbidding figure but is just like any other passenger, except not wearing any trousers."

● Pictures of the kind of trousers judges will no longer have to wear **94**

WANTED



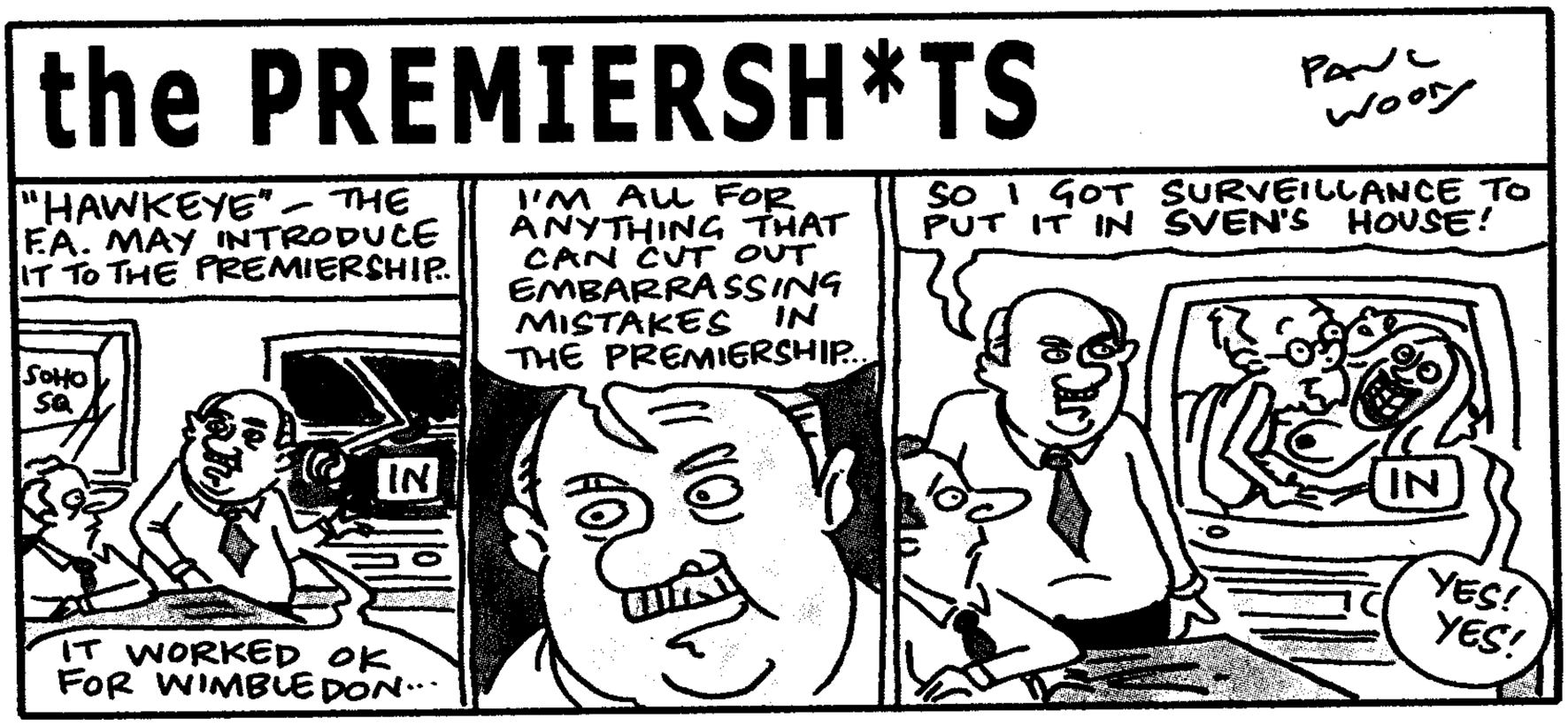
Britain is on top-level 'critical' terrorist alert!

We are desperately searching for some policemen who might be able to save us from being blown up by lunatic Islamists.

The men we are looking for must fit the following profile:

1. When confronted with a bunch of convicted Somali murderers claiming to be visiting Pakistan for a 'back-packing holiday', they must not wave them goodbye with the words, "Have a nice day. Look forward to seeing you on your return when you come back with some harmless chemical souvenirs which you will carry with you on London Transport."
2. Er...
3. That's it.

the PREMIERSH*TS


PAUL WOOD
"HAWKEYE" – THE F.A. MAY INTRODUCE IT TO THE PREMIERSHIP.
SOHO SQ
IN
IT WORKED OK FOR WIMBLEDON...
I'M ALL FOR ANYTHING THAT CAN CUT OUT EMBARRASSING MISTAKES IN THE PREMIERSHIP...
SO I GOT SURVEILLANCE TO PUT IT IN SVEN'S HOUSE!
IN
YES! YES!

At The Proms

7.30 Sir Simon Rattle conducts the Berlin Philanderers Orchestra in a concert performance of Mozart's The Second Marriage of Himself *(surely Figaro? Ed.)*. Sung by Magdalena Cosima van Tutti Frutti (shortly to become Lady Rattle) with the Mishcon de Reya Alimonia Ensemble.

FROM THE DESK OF THE LEADER

Comrades,

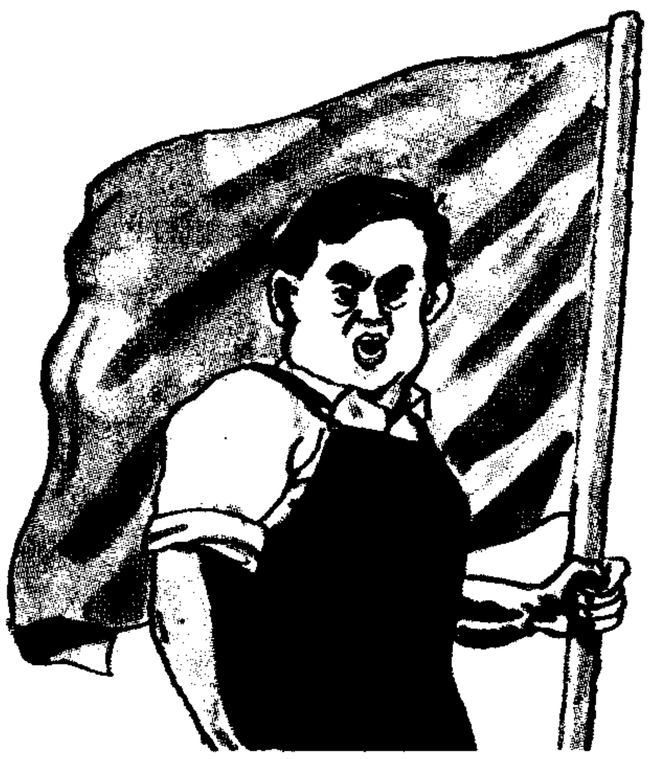
The Age of Change is upon us. We must all work together to achieve the changes that are required to build the new Britain of tomorrow.

That is why today I am announcing to you my first Five-Year Plan, which I have called 'A Five-Year Plan for the Age of Change in the New Britain'.

There are five key points in my Five-Year Plan, which are as follows:

1. *An end to the highly* dangerous personality cult which was allowed to grow up around the previous leader, Comrade Blair.

No one had a greater respect for Comrade Blair than myself, and no one appreciates more warmly all that he did to advance the cause of the Party during his disastrous days in office.



But we must acknowledge that mistakes were made. Many targets were not achieved. There was backsliding and a proliferation of capitalist deviationist errors involving the former leader and his entire household.

I pledge that such lax standards will never be tolerated under the new regime of the Age of Change. Furthermore, those elements of the former regime known to have been involved in corrupt practices (such as Comrade Levy and Comrade Turner) will be arrested and made to stand public trial before being sentenced to the Gulag (ie Ford Open Prison).

All images, statues and photographs of the former leader have been declared illegal as from midnight tonight, and will be forcibly removed.

All elements who continue to express loyalty to the late leader will be incarcerated in prison, when we have built some more. (See Diktat No. 2 – 'British Prisons in an Age of Change'.)

2. Under the now universally discredited old regime, too much power was centralised into the hands of the former leader. Under the new regime in the Age of Change these powers will be returned where they belong – ie, to myself, representing the British people and the British Parliament.

In honour of this historic return of power to the people, I hereby declare that a special day shall be designated, to be known as 'GB Day'.

Flags will be issued to all British citizens, regardless of their gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, creed, or willingness to wave them.

The State declares that a condition of extreme gaiety and communal good humour shall prevail across the British nation for a period not exceeding 24 hours. (NB. There will be no smoking or drinking.)

3. The Party will mark the Age of Change by building 30 million new homes all over the British countryside to house the Polish workers who have had to be brought in to build the homes in the first place.

4. To encourage a healthy lifestyle in British womanhood, each pregnant female citizen will be issued with a one-off payment which must only be spent on the following traditional healthy items:

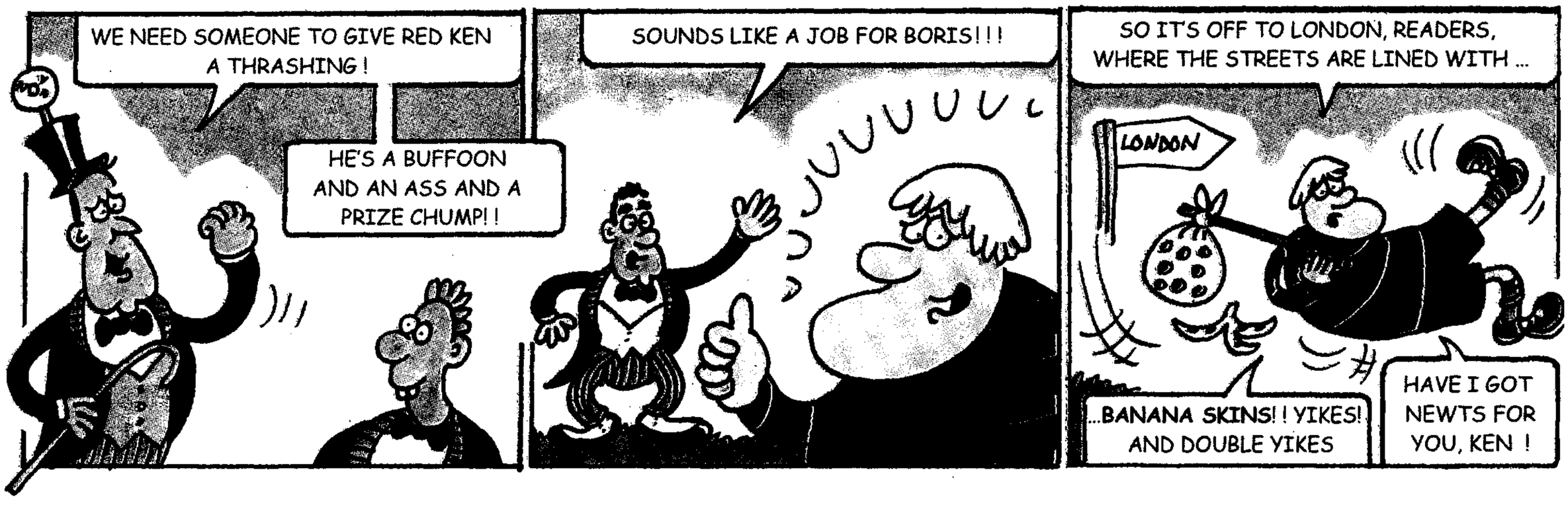
British potatoes (not crisps)
British cabbage
British vodka (surely some mistake?)

5. I pledge that in the Britain of the Age of Change there will be an end to the outmoded principle of bourgeois sofa government. Hard chairs will be provided for all members of the Supreme Council of Ministers (formerly the Cabinet).

Gordon Brown

Agreed and ratified by myself (without any need for a referendum) as your Leader in the Age of Change.

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


WE NEED SOMEONE TO GIVE RED KEN A THRASHING!
HE'S A BUFFOON AND AN ASS AND A PRIZE CHUMP!!
SOUNDS LIKE A JOB FOR BORIS!!!
SO IT'S OFF TO LONDON, READERS, WHERE THE STREETS ARE LINED WITH ...
LONDON
...BANANA SKINS!! YIKES! AND DOUBLE YIKES
HAVE I GOT NEWTS FOR YOU, KEN!

That Very Important Newsnight Row In Full

(Serious music. Paxman turns to interview himself)

Paxman: So are you going to wear a tie?

Paxman: What I said was...

Paxman: Are you going to wear a tie?

Paxman: I think there are more important issues than...

Paxman: Are you going to wear a tie?

Paxman: The whole tie debate has moved on and...

Paxman: Just answer the question. Are you going to wear a tie?

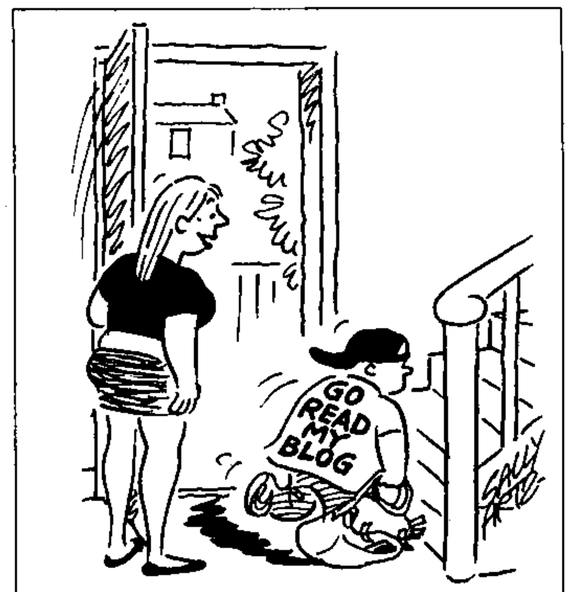
Paxman: My record on ties is absolutely consistent...

Paxman: No, I'm sorry, I'm going to have to ask this one more time. Are you or are you not going to wear a tie?

Paxman: This is ridiculous. I'm not standing for this.

Paxman: Neither am I.

(Both rip off their ties and storm off in a huff)



"What did you do in school today?"

BLUE PETER APPEAL 2007

BLUE PETER has announced details of its 2007 appeal, which it hopes will raise a staggering £50,000 to go towards helping a cash-strapped BBC Director General pay a record OFSTED fine.

"The situation here in TVC really is dire and that's why we're urging all our young viewers to start collecting empty milk bottle lids, old shoes and pieces of tinfoil, so we can finally put a smile back on the face of our miserable Director General," said producer *(cont. p. 94)*

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL MURDOCH PAPERS

Experts Say Flood Victims 'To Be Cheered Up By Simpsons Movie'

On other pages

■ MAJOR Tory policy review calls for "married couples to be encouraged to go and see the Simpsons movie" **4**

■ EXPERTS warn that plugs for the Simpsons movie masquerading as news stories in Murdoch-papers "to soar" **12**

TELEVISION PRODUCERS IN MANIPULATION OF FOOTAGE TO MEET OWN TWISTED ENDS SHOCK

- Pope 'shits in woods'
- Bears 'Catholic"
- Er, wait a minute...

That new 90-second BBC News Bulletin

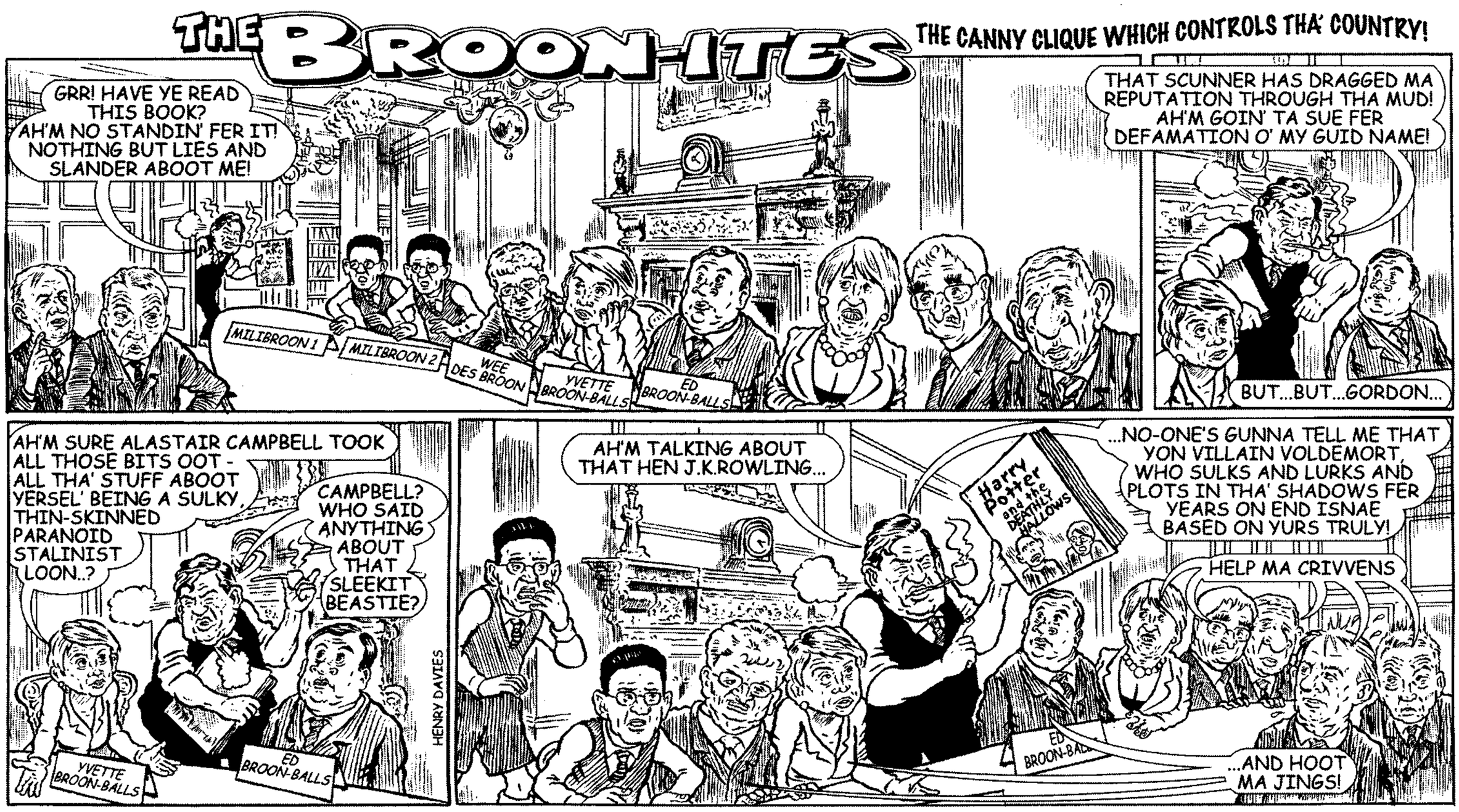
How it will look

BONG! **Natasha Kaplinsky** *(for it is she)*: Hi, young people. This news is really short. And it's not boring at all. To be honest it is really cool! Well that's all the news we've got time for! So, ciao, stay safe and now you can go out to the pub, or whatever! **BONG!**

Where are they now?

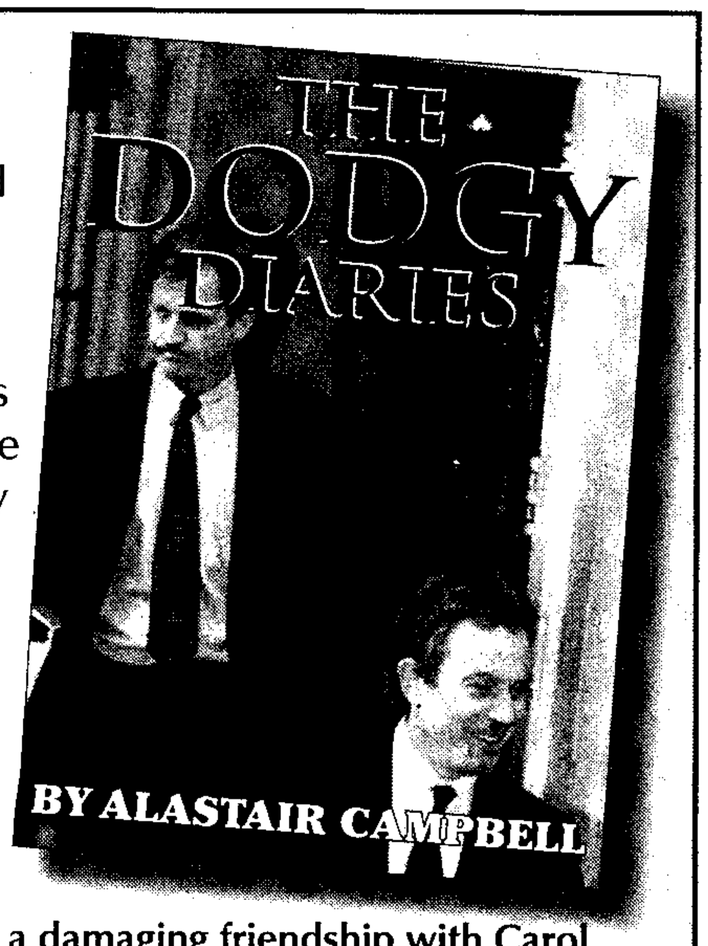
Tony Blair

FOR TEN years Tony Blair was the most powerful man in Britain. You could not open a newspaper or turn on the television without seeing his smiling face. But when he left office last week he quickly faded from memory and now few people can remember who he was or what he did. It is thought that he now spends his time doing good works in the Holy Land, although no one has seen him. *(Reuters)*


THE BROON-ITES
THE CANNY CLIQUE WHICH CONTROLS THA' COUNTRY!
GRR! HAVE YE READ THIS BOOK? AH'M NO STANDIN' FER IT! NOTHING BUT LIES AND SLANDER ABOOT ME!
THAT SCUNNER HAS DRAGGED MA REPUTATION THROUGH THA MUD! AH'M GOIN' TA SUE FER DEFAMATION O' MY GUID NAME!
MILIBROON 1
MILIBROON 2
WEE DES BROON
YVETTE BROON-BALLS
ED BROON-BALLS
BUT...BUT...GORDON...
AH'M SURE ALASTAIR CAMPBELL TOOK ALL THOSE BITS OOT - ALL THA' STUFF ABOOT YERSEL' BEING A SULKY, THIN-SKINNED PARANOID STALINIST LOON..?
CAMPBELL? WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT THAT SLEEKIT BEASTIE?
YVETTE BROON-BALLS
ED BROON-BALLS
HENRY DAVIES
AH'M TALKING ABOUT THAT HEN J.K.ROWLING...
Harry Potter and the DEATHLY HALLOWS
...NO-ONE'S GUNNA TELL ME THAT YON VILLAIN VOLDEMORT, WHO SULKS AND LURKS AND PLOTS IN THA' SHADOWS FER YEARS ON END ISNAE BASED ON YURS TRULY!
HELP MA CRIVVENS
...AND HOOT MA JINGS!

Advertisement

The most sensational political memoirs ever published. The incredible secrets of the Blair era are at last exposed by the man at the centre of it all!



Read how

- Tony Blair and Gordon Brown didn't get on very well!
- Cherie Blair had a damaging friendship with Carol Caplin who was the girlfriend of a notorious Australian conman!
- Peter Mandelson used to have a moustache!
- The Blairs had a child whilst still living at 10 Downing Street!
- Campbell warned Blair not to invade Iraq, which he predicted would end in disaster but then loyally stood by Blair because Campbell is such a good bloke!
- Campell broke down and wept at the news that the BBC had murdered Dr Kelly despite his best efforts to save him!
- Princess Diana fell madly in love with Alastair Campbell at their first meeting, begging him to marry her and only having an affair with Dodi Fayed in the hope of making Campbell jealous!
- Alastair Campbell kept a really boring diary the whole time he was at No 10, which he added to later in a desperate attempt to sex it up in the hope that someone might buy it!

All this and more in the incredible 800-page DODGY DIARIES. Available now in all good book shops!

Nursery Times

Friday, July 20, 2007

PUDDLEDUCK, GRUNT – IT'S ON AGAIN!

by Our Man In The Farmyard **Robert Fox**

THE countryside was buzzing with rumours last night that the on-off affair between beautiful heiress Jemima Puddleduck and pig-about-town Hugh Grunt had been re-ignited.

Grunt was recently seen emerging from Jemima's hut at 7 in the morning, prompting speculation that the farmyard's most glamorous couple were once again an item.

However, friends of Jemima, daughter of the late billionaire shark Sir Jammy Fishpaste, said last night that it was 'premature' to speculate as to whether the couple will get married in a ceremony to rival the recent wedding of Ali Babar the elephant to Mr Grunt's former avian squeeze, Liz Hurleybird.

Jemima is still in mourning for her pet kitten Marmite, and Hugh is still grieving over the loss of a tin of baked beans.

School news

St Cakes

St Coke's Day was held on July 11th. Mr P. Doherty was the guest speaker and gave out prizes in special silver foil. Parents were invited to look round Class 'A' Drug rooms and the Cannabis Garden, designed by Ms Rosie Boycott O.C. The traditional Drug of War contest between St Cokes and Harrow was cancelled after some contestants were caught trying to smoke the rope. There was a performance by the school orchestra of Elgar's Cocaine Overture in the Sir Keith Richard Memorial Hall. The Lower VIth put on a production of "An Inspector Knacker Calls" in the Daniella Westbrook Theatre. Spliffs were run over the Moss Meadow and several boys were arrested by the West Midlands police. The school song "Forty Grammes On" was sung in the chapel by the leavers under the Director of Music Sir Oswald "Ozzy" Osborne O.C. The school motto was then intoned by the new Head of Crack House, Rupert Street-Value (Needles), "Floreat Colombia". Passings out were on July 13th. Sentences were handed down on July 14th.

KATE TO GIVE UP CRACKHEAD

by Our Showbiz Staff **Phil Nostrils**

THE SUPERMODEL Kate Moss has told friends that she is determined to kick the Pete Doherty habit and come off the dangerous boyfriend.

"She knows he is bad for her health," said one friend, "and she wants to clean up her act."

The trouble is that Crackhead (otherwise known as Dope, Shit or Complete Charlie) is very addictive.

"You try him once and you're hooked for life. It's going to be hard for Kate but once she has found the willpower to quit Pete then she can go out with him again and get even more publicity *(Is this right? Ed.)*

A Doctor Writes

AS A doctor, I'm often asked, "Doctor, are you going to blow me up?"

The simple answer is "No, of course not." What happens is that the patient goes to see their doctor and notices that he has a foreign name and a beard.

At this point the patient experiences panic attacks, trembling, cold sweats and an urge to run away and return on Monday when old Dr Finlay is doing the surgery.

Normally, the patient has no cause for alarm, but in a very small number of cases the doctor, or *Terroristicus jihadicus normalis* to give it the full medical name, may indeed be a member of Al Qaeda. In these circumstances, the answer to the question may in fact be, "Yes, I'm afraid I am going to blow you up. Die, western infidel!"

If you are worried about your NHS doctor, go privately and you will be blown up much quicker. *(Is this right? Ed.)*

© A Doctor.

"It's not a secret terrorist message written in an Islamic script – it's my normal writing!"

That Honorary Degree Citation In Full

SALUTAMUS YUSUFUM ISLAMICUM QUONDAM FELIX STEVENENSIS POPULARE CANTORUM FAMOSSISSIMUM 'MATUTINUS FRAGMENTUS EST' 'MATTEUS FILIUSQUE' 'AMO CANEM MEUM' ET MULTOS ALTEROS SIMILAROS SED CONVERTUS AD RELIGIONI ISLAMICO CUM BARBO LONGO ET VESTIBUS ARABICIS MUSICO NUNC PROHIBITUS SILENTO GUITARI PER MULTOS ANNOS GAUDEAMUS LAUDATE ALLAM.

© UNIVERSITAS EXETORUM 2007 (quondam Polytechnium Buddleigh Saltertorensis)

CONCERT FOR CAMILLA 'A Huge Success'

by Our Royal Staff **Lunchtime O'Bono**

A CONCERT to celebrate the birthday of Her Royal Highness Camilla The Not The Princess Of Wales attracted a huge crowd of five close friends in the front room at Highgrove. Among the stars performing for Camilla were the original Tetbury Foot Stompers (Bill Beard, trumpet; Wally Bovis, banjo; Ted Bingle, trombone and Miles Kington, double bass).

One guest, Lady Lobelia Lycett-Greenpeace, said that the concert had been "such fun" and "a really fitting tribute to a lovely lady"

poverty or highlight the dangers posed by climate change.

Said the lead singer, "We just want to play our songs really loud, get drunk afterwards and sleep with *(cont. p. 94)*.

● Plans have been announced for a massive charity concert to remember Ricky Gervais's act dying tragically at the end of the Diana concert at Wembley. (Reuters)

WEMBLEY LATEST

THERE was shock today after a rock band took to the stage at Wembley not to remember Princess Diana, end global

WORLD'S OLDEST MAMMOTH FOUND

by Our Palaeontological Staff
Tyrannosaurus Rex Harrison and the late Sir David Permafrost

THE world of palaeontology was rocked to its pre-Cambrian foundations yesterday by the discovery in Central London of a perfectly-preserved Libdemosaurus, a form of mammoth several million years old.

This unique specimen, known affectionately to the world of science as 'Ming' lay unnoticed on a Westminster front bench for millennia, and it has only recently been dug up and put on public show.

Scientists believe the creature could live again if enough people vote for it at the next election.

But at present the Ming, a woolly creature which likes to sleep in the afternoons, has *(cont. p. 94)*.

Daily Tudorgraph
20 July 1543

Ye On/Off Royal Romance!

by Our Court Staff MASTER WILLIAM DEEDESPEARE

The much discussed relationship between His Majesty King Henry VIII and his long-time girlfriend Katherine "Kate" Howard is, say friends, definitely off ,"as is her head".

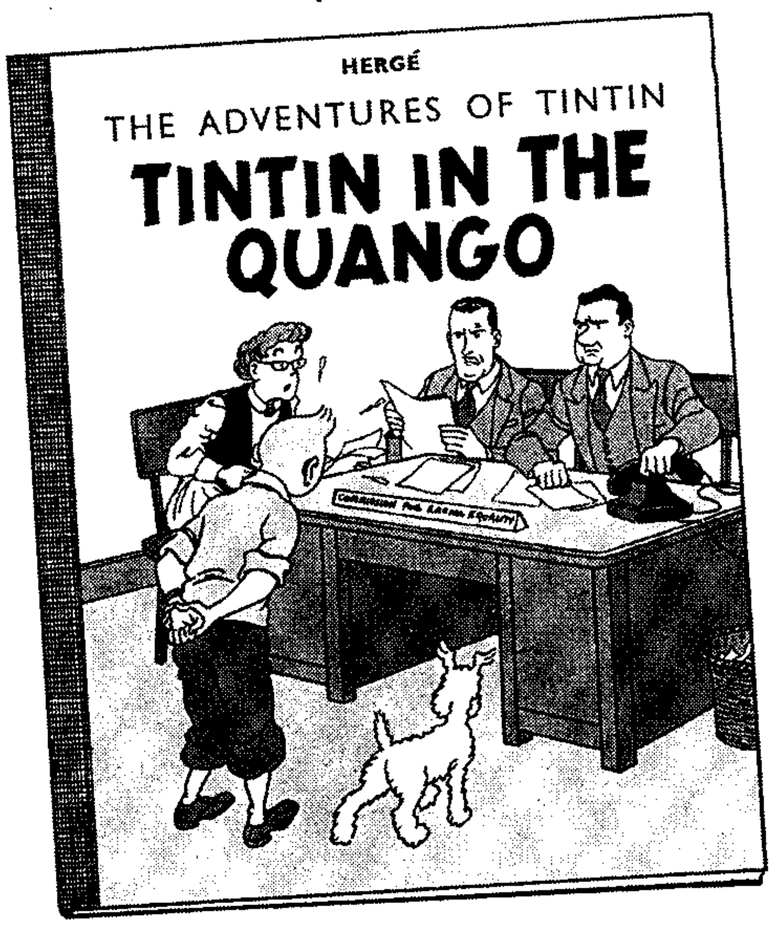
King Henry is said to be regretting his ending of their relationship and her life, but Royal sources say, "There is no going back now. Henry may be missing her, but Kate is not in a position to rekindle their romance, being dead".

On other pages
British Winner At Real Tennis Tournament... His Majesty triumphs at Hampton Court 3
Unfunny Cartoon by Holbein 94

Advertisement

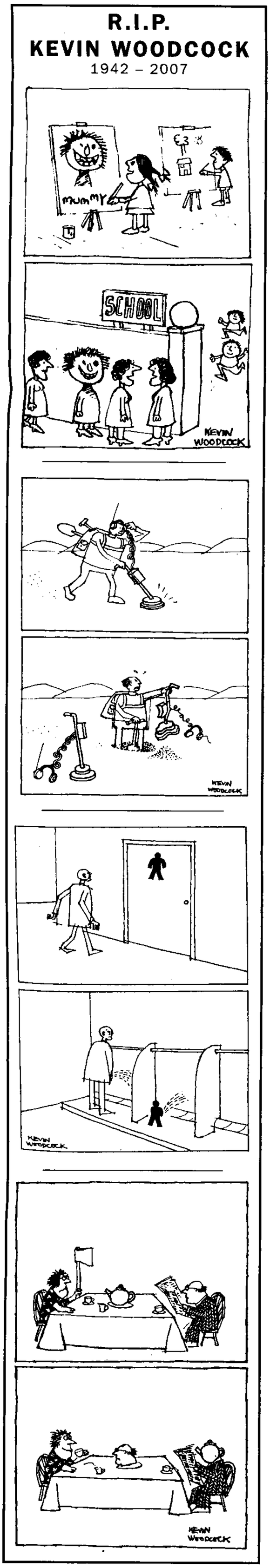
OUT NOW!

The Latest Adventure Story From Hergé



TINTIN, the boy reporter, embarks on his most comic caper yet when he is hauled up in front of the Commission for Racial Equality and is accused of being a racist. Will he escape? Will plain-clothes policemen Thompson and Thompson arrest everybody in Borders for selling material liable to incite the public to racial hatred? Why is Snowy white?

Early Question Time



IN THE COURTS

Mohamed al-Fayed v. Regina (Day 94)

Before Mr Justice Cocklecarrot

(The hearing was resumed today of the preliminary hearings relating to the hearings in principio *relating to the inquest into the death of the late Diana, Princess of Wales. Appearing for Mr Fugger, Mr Michael Mansfee QC sought leave to summon before the Court Her Majesty The Queen)*

Cocklecarrot: And upon which point, Mr Moneysfield, do you propose to examine Her Majesty?

Mr Moneygrubber QC: My Lord, I submit that the monarch is the pivotal figure in a web of international intrigue stretching across all five continents and involving senior intelligence officers from every country in the world.

Cocklecarrot: Surely this is a somewhat far-fetched proposition, Mr Moneybox?

Moneybelt: Indeed it is, My Lord, but my client Mr Fugger is paying me a huge sum in daily refreshers and I submit that you would do the same thing were you in my shoes.

Cocklecarrot: I shall be the *judge* of that, Mr Moneypenny.

(Court collapses in sycophantic laughter at this example of judicial wisdom)

Mr al-Fugger *(from the court)*: Hey! You in the wig! Ask him about the fuggin' Duke!

Mr Moneyorder: I have just taken instruction from my client, My Lord, and he quite rightly reminds me that it would be remiss of this court not also to call as a witness His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh.

Cocklecarrot: Really, Mr Moneyspider, you will be telling us next that Prince Philip was engaged in a homicidal conspiracy with His Holiness the Pope, Mr Nelson Mandela and the Loch Ness Monster.

Mr Moneylaunderer: Your Lordship appears to be gifted with second sight, for those are indeed the very names which appear in my client's sworn affidavit.

Mr al-Fugger: I thought you fuggin' told me not to fuggin' swear?

Moneyprogramme: Ha, ha, ha. Very amusing, Mr Fugger. Do you think I could have my brown envelope now, please, and I'll try to spin things out for a few more days.

Cocklecarrot: I am sure, Mr Moneystillfortea, that we shall give all these matters our closest consideration for many more days and perhaps even months, if you are very lucky. Perhaps we should discuss this over luncheon at the Garrick.

(The case was adjourned)

Is too much choice making us miserable? *YOU DECIDE!*

Email, mobile text, or phone with your answer. Or send a letter. Or not.
What do YOU think?

a) I never thought about having too much choice before.

b) I never thought that much about having too much choice before.

c) I thought about it once.

d) I thought about it once, but wasn't bothered by it.

e) I think about it more than once.

f) I think about it a few times a week.

g) I think about it constantly, but don't moan about it.

h) I think about it constantly.

i) I think about it constantly and feel suicidal.

"Got any nicotine flavoured crisps?"

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
George Melly

So. Farewell
Then George
Melly.

Jazz singer and
Flaneur.

With your Fedora
Hats and colourful
Suits
You were a
Larger than
Life character.

"Frankie and Johnny
Were lovers".

Yes. That was
Your hit
Song.

Which Keith points
Out is entirely
Suitable for
A man of
Your bisexual
Propensities.

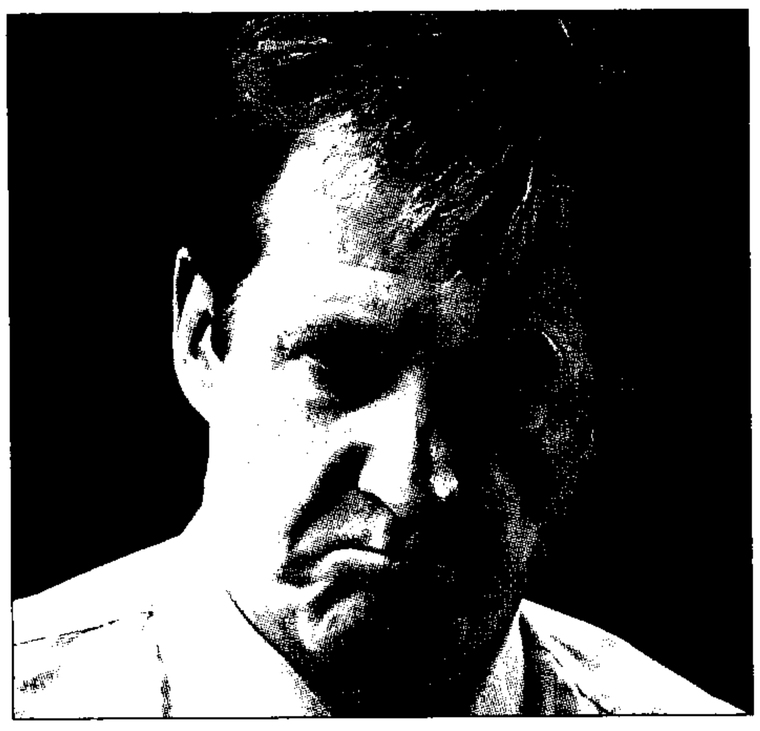
"The Joint Is
Jumping".

Sadly it isn't
Any more.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

"Have you seen the McMuffin man, the McMuffin man, the McMuffin man..."

DIARY



ALASTAIR CAMPBELL

Monday, 21 December 1998

I'm sick of dealing with fucking wankers, I said to the Queen: you get all of the shit and then they fuck you up the backside.

She was sympathetic, looking down at her toes, then along the line of other people waiting to be presented.

Basically, the woman's bloody angry, and the way she vents her anger is just to stand there in silence, grinning malevolently and holding out her hand like she's challenging each newcomer to a fucking arm-wrestle. Sometimes she can't help herself, and she lets all that pent-up anger out with one great big fuck-you wave.

Her look this morning said who-needs-this-shit, and I know how she was feeling. Like her, I was in total fuck-it mode. I've had it up to fucking here.

I asked her how the Christmas bollocks was going. The Christmas what? she said. The Christmas Fucking Message, I said. She said, oh, fine, she was thinking of saying something along the lines of the need for all human beings to live together in harmony. You don't want to do it like that, I said, you want to tell them that they're all a load of fucking bollocks, because that way you'll look like you know something they don't know, and it'll play well. But she wasn't listening. I could tell from the way she blocked her ears and called for help. I felt like crying. Sometimes I don't know why I fucking bother.

Tuesday 22 December 1998

Today was no better. Cabinet all over the shop. We'd got onto Housing Policy, and Clare Fucking Short gave one of her sighs and said to be absolutely honest her flat was crying out for a new set of fucking curtains, did anyone have an old pair they didn't want.

So then Peter Mandelson got up and screamed, don't fucking piss with me, I know what you're all doing, you're all out to get me. You're all pretending to talk about curtains, but what you're really talking about is me and getting rid of me and swapping me for someone new, well, I've just about had enough of this.

TB says Peter, calm down, and Peter says, bollocks to that, what do you mean, calm down, I'm not fucking angry, don't fucking patronise me! Then Mo Mowlam says blimey, it's getting a bit hot in here and she takes off her top, and she's not wearing a bra. So Robin Cook looks askance and gets on his high fucking horse. "It ill-behoves us to get mired in trivia," he says. "Is it not time we got back onto the subject of Housing Policy?". He asks whether there might not be a strong moral case for a substantial tax rebate for a married man who is prepared to house a single woman, a secretary perhaps, or a personal assistant, in a flat in central London.

John Prescott comes out strong in support, and Mandelson, who's by now wiped away all the tears and given his nose a fucking good blow, says the tax rebate should rightly be extended to all single professional men who have secured loans against mortgages from, say, friends or business partners.

While we are all considering the various ramifications, GB comes through the door, and a bucket of water someone left by mistake on the lintel sploshes down on his head and all over his suit, clean on.

GB goes right over the top and totally loses the plot, claiming someone must have put the bucket there deliberately. His judgement is seriously impaired. I tell him in all honesty that a window-cleaner left it there by mistake, and if he wants to check then I have written proof, including a signed confession from the window-cleaner in question. Out of the corner of my eye, I spot TB trying hard to stifle a laugh. "I don't need this shit," mutters GB, and we move onto Transport.

Wednesday, December 23 1998

I spoke to TB and started drafting resignation letters. I felt desperately sorry for Peter Mandelson. He had clearly been crying, and needed my support.

I went over to him, said this is all absolutely dreadful but we just have to get through it. I put one arm around his shoulder, and with the other I eased the knife, as gently as I could, between his shoulder blades. By this time, he was writhing in pain, but I assured him that I would be strong for him, and do everything physically possible to ease his passing. He kept saying why, why, why, but I reassured him that it just had to be done, and as the tears cascaded down his cheeks, I sat alongside him and comforted him and read him his farewell resignation letter, and I gripped his shoulder and told him he had to be strong before giving it one last thrust. "You don't deserve this, Peter, you really don't, you're one of the greatest ministers this country has ever had," I said.

Bumped into JP on the way home, and he congratulated me on a very very smooth operation. We agreed that Mandelson's no better than a cartload of bollocks and we're 100% better off without him.

Thursday December 24th, 1998

I started the day in a foul mood and it got worse. For crying out fucking loud, TB was getting on my tits, he just wasn't doing what I was fucking telling him to do. "Look, chum," I said, "if you want to carry on being Prime Minister, you'd better shape fucking up you miserable wanker or I'll see you're shafted good and fucking proper."

It seemed to clear the air. After he'd wiped his tears away, we got on with the job. He was worried by yesterday's poll: people thought he was insincere and couldn't think for himself. "Tell me it isn't true, Alastair," he said. He begged me to draft a speech to show that he was sincere.

That moment, the sun caught that slight hint of auburn in his hair. Fuck it, I love him when he needs me.

"You know what I really want, Alastair?" he said. "I want to be known as the People's Princess."

"That title's fucking taken," I told him. He's always been crap at market positioning. "But I could arrange to have them say you were the People's Prime Minister."

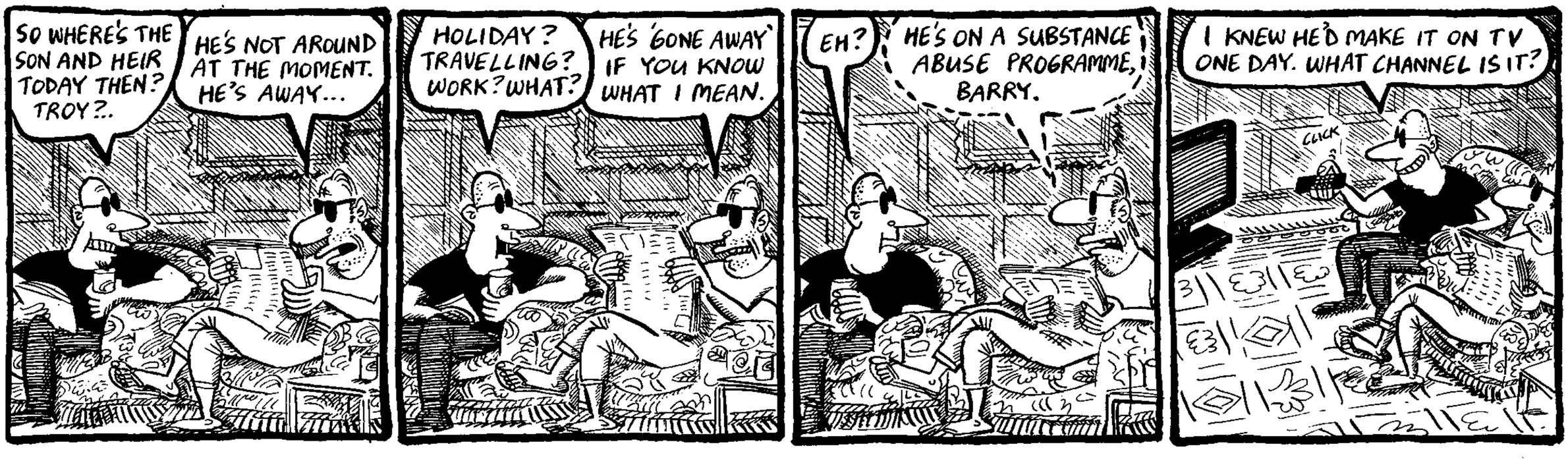
"*Were*? What do you mean – *were*?" he said.

He just didn't get it. "You'd obviously have to agree to die first," I explained. "That way, you'll have them eating out of the palm of your fucking hand."

He said he wasn't sure about that, not if it meant GB taking over. I said, no way, GB's not going to be PM in a million years, the guy's a fucking arsehole. I tell him I've heard it was GB who balanced that bucket of water on the lintel on Tuesday, just to make himself look like he was being persecuted. "Believe me, I know these things," I said. "A fucking loser like that's never going to be Prime Minister."

As told to

CRAIG BROWN


SO WHERE'S THE SON AND HEIR TODAY THEN? TROY?..
HE'S NOT AROUND AT THE MOMENT. HE'S AWAY...
HOLIDAY? TRAVELLING? WORK? WHAT?
HE'S 'GONE AWAY' IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.
EH?
HE'S ON A SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROGRAMME, BARRY.
I KNEW HE'D MAKE IT ON TV ONE DAY. WHAT CHANNEL IS IT?
CLICK

Literary Review

Money for old dope

The Books of Albion: The Collected Writings of Peter Doherty

(Orion, £20)

WHAT is the defining characteristic of modern celebrity? Lack of any identifiable talent is often a factor, but the absolute sine qua non, surely, is the ability not to mind, or even notice, that vast numbers of people regard you with contempt.

How you acquire the thick skin is up to you (Pete Doherty appears to have taken a strictly pharmaceutical route) but acquire it you must. And then anything is possible. Even books like this.

Nice subtitle, incidentally. "The Collected Writings of Peter Doherty" implies many things: that these writings somehow needed to be collected, and civilisation would never have forgiven us if they hadn't been; that writer "Peter" is somehow of greater moment than drug hoover rock fool "Pete"; and that they are writings at all, and not just random scrawlings in felt pen. We know about the felt pen because these are not just diaries in the accepted Michael Palin-Alastair Campbell sense of the word, carefully edited (and possibly polished) versions of original handwritten scribbles gleaned from countless small volumes. No, these are the handwritten scribbles themselves, carefully photographed and reproduced in full colour at absurd expense. "A young man's journey over the last seven or eight years," writes Peter in a brief (seven-line) introduction, the only actual work he has contributed to the creation of this book. "In and out of consciousness, in and out of Pentonville, in and out of several hearts, homes and hostels... There's a lot of honesty in there... a few gems of the old Irish philosophy..." And an awful lot of rambling drugged-up incoherence too, but then you'd probably guessed that.

There are also many, many photographs of Pete and his chums out of their faces and, possibly for rarity's sake, one or two with his eyes fully open. We have Pete's doodles, we have his favourite newspaper cuttings about himself, and some amusing mementoes of occasions he's surely too out of it to remember. Along the way we can see the innocent young heroin addict gradually transformed into the raddled old heroin addict, a miserable, self-lacerating solipsist who scratches out the eyes in a photo of himself, almost certainly unaware that however much he hates himself, large chunks of the populace hate him even more.

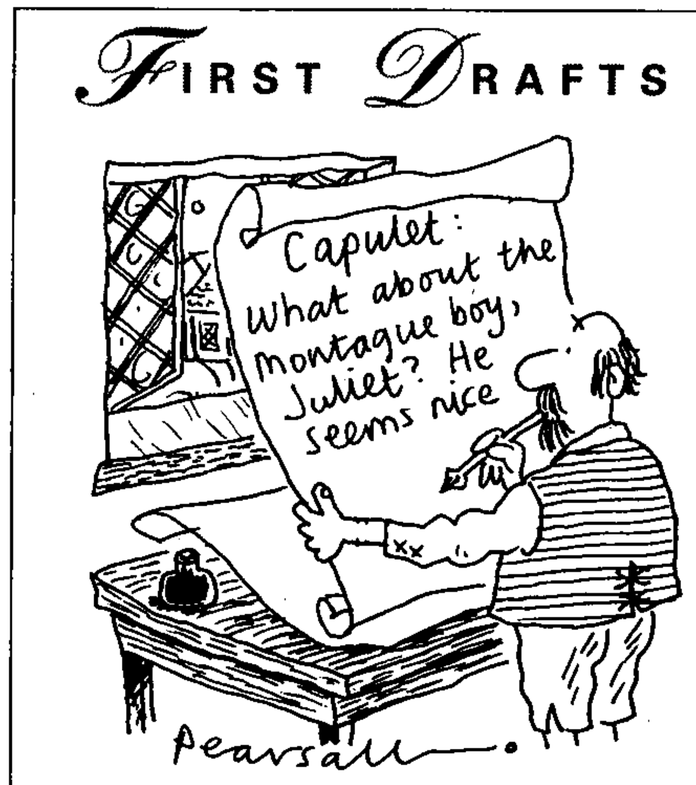
Also in long-term decline is his handwriting, which is almost legible in the early entries, although it doesn't always help you work out what he's going on about ("What does Morrissey's sister do? German wants a pork-pie hat. Who will sell me a lie?") But halfway through the book your eyes are beginning to water, as the words, if that's what they are, swim in and out of focus: "all day I could follow her gaze like the world but the son of gods'd have it tough not to curtain [?] themselves with her there how can I throw myself into her when she's off so often & my cough & rough foot shin appal I know still the music plays &"

And that's one of the more lucid passages.

There's an inescapable truth behind all this: if any of it were genuinely worth reading, someone would have typed it up so you could read it. Some books, though, are not designed to be read. They are designed to be sold (£4 off at Waterstone's). This one falls neatly into the newish category of Rock 'n' Roll Coffee Table Books, something to open and glance at from time to time, maybe, but primarily something to possess. In a perfect world, possession would be a criminal offence, although even then the police probably wouldn't prosecute. Possession with intent to deal, however, would be a more serious matter. Orion, who are ultimately responsible for this pitiful, hubristic volume, would have to answer for their sins. But then in a perfect world, or indeed in any world slightly better than this one, this book wouldn't actually exist.

● News that model Kate Moss had marked the purported end of her relationship with singer Pete Doherty by "torching a huge stash of love letters, poems, songs and paintings" will have caused great distress to the "cheating junkie" (© the *Sun*).

It can hardly have raised spirits at Orion either. Will its 2008 non-fiction catalogue now have to be urgently rewritten?



Shakespeare

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Life Class, Pat Barker

(Hamish Hamilton, £16.99)

THEY sat in a little estaminet in the market square, a mile or two behind the lines, as the pale Flanders sky sank into twilight. Madame was smoking cigarettes at the till in that indefinably Gallic way French people have.

"Just think," Elinor said. "If you were writing a novel about all this ninety years in the future, how would you do it?"

He thought for a moment of the horrors of the day that had passed in the field hospital, Dr Filgrave's hands dripping with pink, intestinal fluid as he bent over an exposed stomach cavity, the severed limbs lying in the sawdust. "I don't know," he said, "I think I'd put in lots of detail. Get the descriptions of Great War medical treatments absolutely accurate. It's the only way."

"But then," she suggested – she was a dark girl with short shining hair and full, pouting lips – "we have a life beyond the war, don't we?"

"Of course we do," he said. "After all, we're both art students. You'd have to get that in. I mean, you can't go wrong with art school bohemianism, can you? Plus you could make one or two of those figurative connections that the critics always rave about. Stuff about the artist's technique being a bit like the surgeon's."

Madame was smoking another Gitane, the ironical creases at the corner of her mouth making her look even more French than ever. "Oh and of course art students generally get to have more sex than ordinary characters."

"What about real people?" she said, blushing a scarlet colour that reminded him of the pailful of human guts he'd shovelled from the operating theatre floor earlier that afternoon. "Should you put them in?"

"Well who's that artist chap you see at the Café Royal who gets pissed all the time and sleeps with his models? Augustus John. He'd be great in a novel. Not to mention Lady Ottoline."

"And dialogue?" she wondered.

"Well, some people say you should go for authenticity, you know, have the characters sound as if they really lived at the time you're writing about. Me, I don't think it matters much. Make the reader feel at home, that's what I say. Wow!" he went on, "that dress is really fab."

"Do you like it?" she said. "I got it from Mr Harrod."

"Yup, you're looking hot," he confirmed, as an incendiary flew over their heads and landed on the further side of the square. "Do you fancy a shag?"

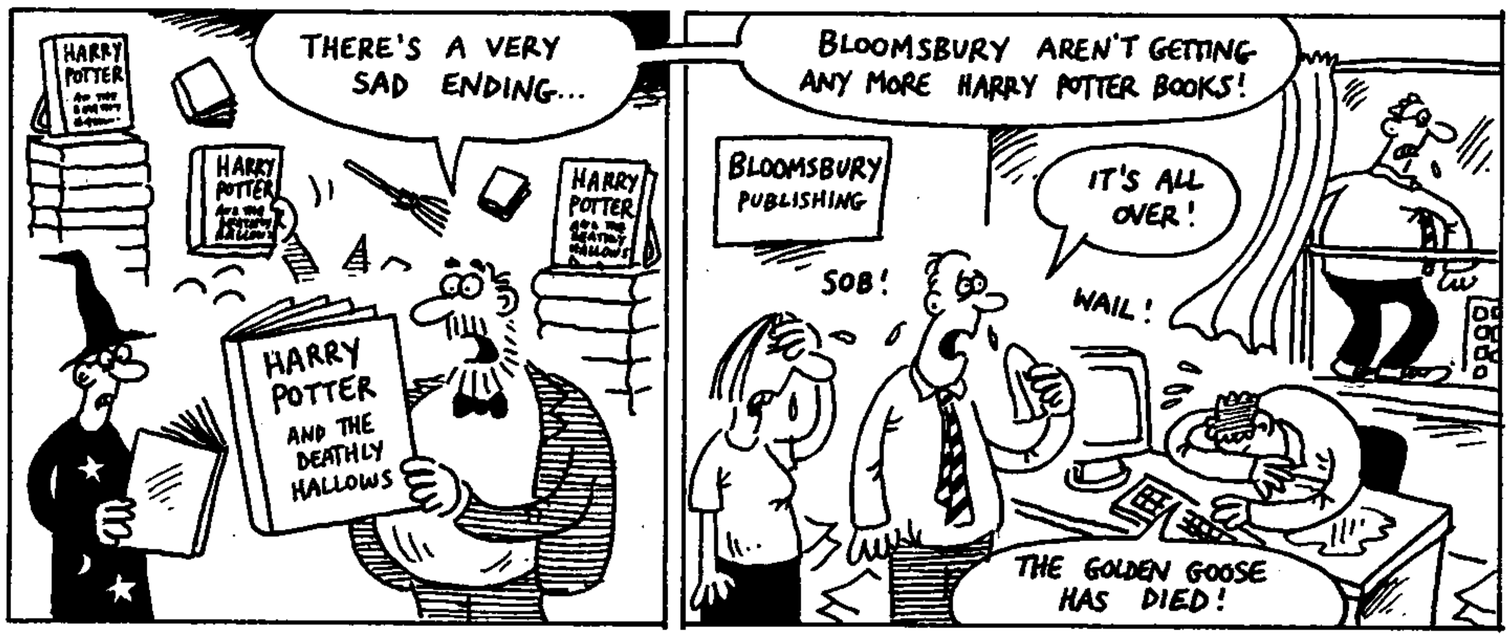
"Really, Paul," she murmured, her soft eyes glowing with anticipation, "I don't know what you mean."

LIBRARY NEWS

■ WITH 77 librarians being laid off in Kent this month (see *Eye* 1181) and Hampshire planning £1m cuts in staffing and books, the quango that's supposed to put libraries "at the heart of national, regional and local life" is busy recruiting.

Never mind librarians who can help the public find what they're looking for, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council is advertising an "attractive six-figure salary plus pension and bonus" for someone to run its 2012 Olympics tie-in activities – aka "the Cultural Olympiad".

Apparently the programme director's well-remunerated job will be to "create a partnership of museums and galleries across the UK to focus on the re-interpretation of collections" to tie in with the London Games. Oh good.



Private Eye's Worstseller Chart

Position	Author	Title	Publisher	Reported advance	Sales to date	Cost of advance per book	Copies needed to sell to make back advance
1	Michael Lawson	*The Inside Ring*	HarperCollins	£125,000	374	£334.22	103,305
2	Katharine Langrish	*Troll Fell*	HarperCollins	£100,000	19,290	£5.18	121,951
3	Mark Mills	*Amagansett*	HarperCollins	£100,000	20,563	£4.86	102,040
4	Ethan Hawke	*Ash Wednesday*	Bloomsbury	£125,000	23,479	£5.32	128,865
5	Alex Barclay	*Darkhouse*	HarperCollins	£350,000	34,063	£10.28	372,340

Notes: Advances as reported in national press and at www.publishersmarketplace.com which is where publishers and agents report their own deals. Sales to date are correct as of this week on Nielsen Bookscan's official chart data site.

CAMPBELL'S SOUP

ACCORDING to Alastair Campbell, his weighty new tome *Tossers and Twats* (aka *The Blair Years*) "records without hindsight what I saw, said, heard, thought, felt and did".

But did the great distortionist really resist all temptation to tweak the diary entries before publication? This is, after all, a man whose name is synonymous with "sexing up" texts, and of whom a high court judge once said: "I did not find Mr Campbell a wholly satisfactory or convincing witness. Mr Campbell was less than completely frank."

No one seems to have noticed a curious admission in the preface to his book. "I have rewritten only where the original made no sense or lacked any context," he explains briskly, "or where avoidable legal complications presented themselves, or where the publishers and editor felt explanation was required for a lay reader." Wherever he has made changes, "I have sought to ensure both meaning and emotions are unchanged".

What he hasn't done, however, is indicate in the text which passages have been altered – a dereliction of authorial duty which makes his book almost as worthless a source as Piers Moron's fabricated diary, *The Insider*.

Take this entry from 27 November 1994, when Campbell warns Robin Cook to stop briefing hacks about his disagreements with Blair. "I loved these chats with Robin," he writes, "because he managed to combine innocence, wit and political dexterity." *Loved*? Why refer to Cook in the past tense when he was still a senior member of the shadow cabinet?

Or this, from 4 May 1995, when he drools over Princess Diana. "She's standing there, absolutely spell-bindingly, drop-dead gorgeous, in a way that millions of photos didn't quite get." *Didn't*?

Or this, from 2 October 1995, when Campbell leaks news of a Tory defection to the *Observer*'s political editor, Tony Bevins. "I loved giving a story like this to Bevins. He loathed the Tories, and he loved big stories..." Like Robin Cook and Princess Di, Bevins is now dead. But since the entry was supposedly written while he was alive and scooping, why lurch into the past tense again?

Anyone who trudges through the Campbell diaries will keep stubbing their toe on similar anachronisms. On 20 December 1997, for instance, he refers to Simon Walters as a *Mail on Sunday* hack. Though Walters is indeed at the *MoS* today, back in December 1997 he was actually political editor of the *Express on Sunday*.

Campbell expresses the hope that his dreary diary will be "a resource for students of politics, of Europe, of Ireland, of our relations with the US, and many other issues studied in universities". No doubt his journals are slightly more authentic than Piers Moron's, but how can anyone trust them as a contemporaneous record without knowing which passages were "improved" after the event?

JUST FANCY THAT!

"She [Princess Diana] said hello, held out her hand and said she was really pleased to meet me, so I mumbled something back about me being more pleased... There was something about her eyes that went beyond radiance. They locked on to you and were utterly mesmeric. She had perfect skin and her whole face lit up when she spoke and there were moments when I had to fight to hear the words because I'm just lost in the beauty. And I'm thinking how could I have written all those vile things about her..." – *Alastair Campbell's diary, 4 May 1995.*

"To Windsor for the Queen's Golden Jubilee media reception... There was something truly pathetic about these so-called hardened hacks, many of them self-proclaimed republicans, bowing and scraping the whole time. She moved effortlessly between them and left grown men in little puddles of excitement as she moved on to form the next one. She was such an old pro but there was something mildly sick-making about the way they all fell about in front of her." – *Alastair Campbell's diary, 25 April 2002.*

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ THIS YEAR, papers including the *Guardian* and *Observer* have sensibly dropped the traditional "Summer Reading" specials in which authors recommend each other's work.

As a result, those who persist with the plugfests seem to have attracted the most shameless puffers ever. In the celeb-obsessed *Times*'s summer books splurge, Stephen King extolled his Hodder stablemate Sarah Gruen; Martin Jarvis plugged an Agatha Christie audiobook with "none other than my wife, Rosalind Ayres" as reader; and the Duchess of Northumberland distinterestedly commended a book by Ian August about the making of her own garden at Alnwick – somehow forgetting to mention that August is the man she put in charge in the project and that she contributes a foreword to it.

■ TO THE HarperCollins authors' summer party at the V&A, where guests queued endlessly before being allowed in to sip sham-champagne and listen to the annual address from super-posh HC sultana Victoria Barnsley.

Vicky, who is by marriage the Hon Mrs Nicholas Howard and chatelaine of Castle Howard, boasted about a string of No 1 bestsellers and the publisher's response to owner Rupert Murdoch's Damascene conversion to saving the planet – all Fourth Estate books now printed on recycled paper, the company going carbon-neutral by 2007, three years before the entire Murdoch empire does, etc.

All laudably green but, as one of her editors purred: "You wouldn't know that Vicky drives a Jaguar, would you?"

■ THE judging process for the second Man Booker International Prize, recently awarded to Chinua Achebe, seemed to belong to a bygone era long before global-warming guilt set in.

In her speech at the banquet in Oxford, chairwoman Elaine "Shop Till I Drop" Showalter modestly omitted her own globe-hotting journeys from Princeton in noting that Nadine Gordimer fitted in earlier "meetings in Washington, Toronto and Dublin between her trips to festivals and conferences in Egypt, Mexico, Paris and Brazil"; while Colm Toibin "travelled from Texas, California and New York", with "Ion Trewin and Fiammetta Rocco, our stalwart Man Booker leaders, joining us from London". So much for email and video-conferencing.

Judges for the bog-standard domestic Booker can't help but be struck by the contrast with their own reward – an insultingly puny fee and 150 novels that mostly go straight to Oxfam.

'Bookworm

THEATRE NEWS

MORE on Michael Coveney, the Mr Angry of the Critics' Circle who recently attacked fellow scribe AA Gill for "talking and walking like a homosexual male model".

The latest target for Coveney's fury is 82-year-old Blanche Marvin, a harmlessly dotty amateur critic who dresses up flamboyantly for most first nights in London and is sometimes mistaken for Lady Olivier. Few people seriously object to Marvin, a privately wealthy American who has been interested in theatre so long that she was at the first night of *En Attendant Godot* (later *Waiting for Godot*) in Paris in 1953.

In his latest column for whatsonstage.com, Coveney savages Marvin for being "outrageously rude" (he should talk!). Taking issue with her opposition to stage nudity, he thunders that he cannot understand why "she is taken seriously".

This bizarre diatribe has only landed Coveney in further trouble with his gay counterparts. Marvin, who is seriously ill and whose "rudeness" is in fact just a symptom of her comparative deafness, is one of the great "fag hags" of the West End. Her many gay friends are swearing they will have their revenge on the bilious Coveney "if it's the last thing we do!"

OUT OF CON-TEXT

"ASTONISHING" is the one-word verdict from *Sunday Times* critic Christopher Hart splashed across adverts for the *Lord of the Rings* musical currently playing at Drury Lane.

And indeed, Hart did use that word in his review. Specifically, he said: "There are some things here that are astonishing, such as Michael Therriault's Gollum."

But he followed this up with the observation that "along with some powerful theatrical magic, however, there are serious weaknesses, and the patchiness suggests both flair and a lack of directorial judgment on the part of Matthew Warchus. The quality of the acting varies wildly... The other core problem, as this is a musical, is serious: the music is rubbish... Pure West End cheese... awful, awful songs."

Pseuds Corner

I do some DIY. At present I'm hand-painting Chinese wallpaper for our principal guest suite.

LAURENCE LLEWELYN-BOWEN,
Observer

The best art has always come out of courts – Mozart was employed by the Viennese court – and Sam [Taylor-Wood] and Jay [Jopling] have created a court which is more significant than the royal family. The royals have become a tabloid thing. Sam and Jay are the broadsheet version.

ALEX JAMES,
Time Out

This radical reinterpretation of Gilgamesh, the oldest story in the world, is high-energy, brutal and multi-layered theatre. Three actors in a seven metre-long dirt pit wrestle and roll through four tonnes of earth. Using action figures and Matchbox toy tanks, they retell the 5000 year-old story of tyrannical ruler Gilgamesh and his destructive friend Endiku.

From the Barbican programme of forthcoming events

I have just come out with my most profound sentence for the week. And that sentence was: 'Actually there is no tomorrow.' My office stood still and everyone looked at me. After a few seconds' thought they nodded sternly. 'She's right,' they said, 'there is no tomorrow.'

TRACEY EMIN,
Independent

One would hesitate to connect Burgess's erotic prowess with his literary heft, but the two appear to be intimately linked. When he goes out to teach at 'the Eton of the East', he busily compares the bedroom skills of the Chinese against the Malayans...His women are pillow dictionaries. And in between sessions he is composing his *Sinfoni Melayu* ('which tried to combine the musical elements of the country into a synthetic language which called on native drums and xylophones') or translating Eliot ('Bulan April ia-lah bulan yang dzalim sa-kali').

MARTIN AMIS reviewing ANTHONY BURGESS's autobiography in the *Observer*, 1987, reprised for the 'Writers on writers' feature, *Guardian Saturday Review*

In a moment of coruscating honesty, Snow has admitted that he sees no future for the tie, and that off air he rarely wears one... "My preference would be for Iranian collarless shirts, which can be rather beautiful," he says.

JON SNOW,
The Times

CONTRIBUTORS: Ben Beer, Anon, Jennifer Smith, Iain Graham, Delora Harding, Strobes.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

THE BOURN SUPREMACY

Chauffeur government

AS predicted in Eye 1185, revelations of National Audit Office boss Sir John Bourn's generosity towards himself and his wife with taxpayers' cash appear to have proved too much for the new PM.

Buried among Gordon Brown's plans for constitutional reform was news of a new independent adviser on ministerial interests, Sir Philip Mawer, the former parliamentary standards commissioner. That means Sir John has been elbowed aside from the £30,000-a-year job Blair gave him last year to adjudicate on issues involving ministers' financial interests.

The Eye, meanwhile, has learnt of another accounting oversight at the NAO concerning perks for the boss: not travelling for work this time, but travelling to work.

Sir John's equivalents in the Civil Service have to struggle in each day under their own steam, but Sir John, it emerges, is picked up at home by a chauffeur and whisked straight to his office in Victoria. He is then returned home again in the evening, also at taxpayers' expense.

The unknown but considerable annual costs of this should be recorded as a benefit in the NAO's accounts, just as they would be in company reports. But, as with his wife's £25,000-a-year foreign travel costs (see last Eye), they are omitted every year.

Who is responsible for the omissions? Well, Sir John, for a start. Although he's not a qualified accountant, after 20 years running the top public audit body he should know a benefit in kind when he enjoys it. He personally had to approve his wife's travel and the deal under which the NAO met his tax bill on it, so he would have known he had something to declare. As ought the NAO board, in particular the assistant auditor-general responsible for finances, qualified accountant Michael Whitehouse. He knew all about Sir John's chauffeur and Lady Bourn's travels and could be expected to understand the rules on benefits. Yet both he and the NAO's audit committee waved through the defective accounts.

And the auditor, Haines Watts? The Eye has seen a warning sent to them by a concerned insider in December 2005 that there was insufficient controls on Sir John's travel, yet they gave the 2005/06 report a clean audit certificate.

One area where the NAO has been busy doing its own auditing is over the controversial sell-off of the government's defence research company, Qinetiq. A large slice of the firm was flogged in 2003 to US private equity group Carlyle, with Qinetiq's directors also snapping up allocations. When the company was floated last year there were windfalls all round, including more than £20m each for chief executive Graham Love and chairman Sir John Chisholm.

Was this a good deal for taxpayers? While NAO auditors prepare a report, due out this summer, the Eye learns that Sir John has been meeting and taking regular calls from Chisholm. Are such boss-to-boss chats on a sensitive ongoing audit really a good idea? The NAO refused to comment as the inquiry is ongoing; but not doubt the report on the lottery-style sell-off will be as hard-hitting as ever.

FIRE-FIGHTING

Windsor smoke screen?

WINDSOR's fire fighters are good – too good, in fact, since they get to fires in less than the "standard response time" of 10 minutes. As a result they are now facing big cutbacks to their service.

At one potentially devastating midnight housefire in Windsor in April, they were on the scene within three minutes. Excellent, you might think; but there is a problem with exceeding official response targets. Although a fire can do a lot of damage in 10 minutes, there's no "reward" for arriving at a fire more quickly – and hence the proposed cuts.

The Royal Berkshire Fire Brigade's "Five Year Integrated Risk Management Plan", currently out to consultation, proposes to close Windsor fire station at night. Between 10pm and 8am, it says, the town could be covered by fire engines from Slough, which can reach "the main risk areas" of Windsor within the required 10 minutes.

As well as the castle (well-known for catching fire), Windsor fire fighters look after Legoland, hundreds of historic buildings, two railway stations, two hospitals and the river traffic, not to mention thousands of people's homes, including high-rise flats where time is of the essence.

Although the consultation document claims the station only responds to three night calls a week, a report by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) reveals that the station logged 447 night duty call outs in 2006-7, making nine a week.

However, Windsor fire station is on a prime area of land in central Windsor and developers have already offered vast sums for the nearby fire service homes. The brigade proposed closing the station completely last year but this was refused by the local fire authority. Fire-fighters believe night-time closure may be a not very subtle way to reintroduce the idea of selling the site.

TREE FELLING

Forestry omission

WHEN residents of Houghton-le-Spring near Sunderland helped to plant Newbottle Wood as part of the Great North Forest in the mid-1990s, they never expected to have to go to court to defend it... and especially not from the Forestry Commission.

Last month, however, the local Trees and Wildlife Action Group won a judicial review saving 7,000 trees from the chop. The trees faced the axe even though they were part of a community forest project funded by grants from the Forestry Commission and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, and were planted by volunteers, including schoolchildren, on land set aside by local housing developer Durham Estates.

In 2004, Durham Estates decided that it wanted to use more than a quarter of the 46-acre woodland for something else – a private development of 20 football pitches with car parking and pavilions for the "Russell Foster Youth League" (Russell Foster being the chairman of Durham Estates).

Because of the trees, the developers had to approach the Forestry Commission for deforestation permission. Surprisingly, the commission decided that the proposals "were not likely to have a significant effect on the environment" and that there was no need to bother with an environmental impact assessment, as required under forestry regulations. The campaigners challenged that decision.

Last June the developers had to be ordered by the court to stop felling trees, as they had already started work, despite the pending legal action.

Mr Justice Collins concluded that the commission had "adopted a wrong approach" and should look again at the plans "on a proper basis". He said the football scheme "could have an adverse effect on what is left of the forest", suggesting that issues such as floodlighting did indeed require some sort of impact assessment.

Just to ensure that the Forestry Commission was in no doubt what the judge thought of its chances of appealing against the ruling, he added: "I confess that I found the decision a very easy one to reach. It seemed to me to be self-evident, to be quite honest."

In the Back continues overleaf ➤

WESTMINSTER CARE HOMES

O'Rourke's drift

RELATIVES of the elderly residents who suffered neglect and mistreatment at Lynde House, run at the time by Chai "diddums" Patel's Westminster "Care" Homes, fear that the long-overdue disciplinary proceedings against senior nursing staff are about to collapse.

The case is following an uncannily similar track to the doomed professional conduct case before the General Medical Council against Dr Patel himself (see *Eyes passim*). Charges against four nurses, including a local authority home inspector, have already been thrown out by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC); and last week the hearing against two others, Sarah Johnson, the manageress of the home, and Lyn Maggs, the matron, was adjourned amid chaos and confusion.

On the one hand, lawyers for the two nurses thought it was merely a "directions" hearing and complained that they had not received a witness statement or an experts' report. Lawyers representing the NMC thought it was the start of the case, but hadn't produced an index or bundle of evidence for the disciplinary panel to consider and were forced to accept that "no sensible business" could go ahead.

The two nurses face a series of charges relating to the care of up to 18 elderly people, ranging from failing to ensure they were washed, fed and given fluids, failing to ensure call bells were answered, that care plans were drawn up and that medicines were kept and administered properly. *Eye* readers will recall how patients were left for hours sitting in their own waste, and suffered preventable falls and unexplained bruising. Some were left unmoved for so long they developed bed sores.

When the case resumes at the end of the month, at least three days are expected to be put aside for legal argument. It is anticipated that counsel for the two nurses, Mary O'Rourke, will argue for the charges to be struck out.

It was of course Ms O'Rourke who argued successfully in the high court that the GMC case against Dr Patel be thrown out because it was a dog's dinner of loosely drawn charges and because a highly critical inspection report into the home, which confirmed the families complaints, amounted to no more than hearsay.

Ms O'Rourke is likely to run the same case again. Indeed, at the hearing in April, when the charges relating to the other four nurses were dismissed (two because of ill health), she said as much. She told the professional conduct committee that delay in the case amounted to an abuse of process, that the lack of detail in charges spread across a four-year period also amounts to an abuse of process because the nurses do not know exactly what is alleged against them, and that inspection and independent reports – including one commissioned by Patel's sister – were hearsay.

The "Caring Tycoon" had always maintained that he was looking forward to clearing his name over the Lynde House affair in public. But in the end he never had to because the relatives were denied their day at the GMC. Mr Justice Collins, hearing the judicial review from Ms O'Rourke, pronounced the neglect case against Dr Patel, a "rotten indictment" because it looked like he was being made a scapegoat. Now the families fear they will once again be denied any opportunity to air grievances over the treatment of their loved ones because Ms O'Rourke may be able to argue exactly the same thing again.

● THE Lynde House families originally complained that Mr Justice Collins should never have sat on the GMC judicial review case because of a conflict of interest. At the time, in February 2005, his brother Dr Mark Collins worked as a consultant psychiatrist at Dr Patel's Priory Group of health and rehabilitation centres.

Their complaint was dismissed by the Office for Judicial Complaints after Lord Falconer, the then Lord Chancellor, and Lord Phillips, the Lord Chief Justice, said they were "satisfied" with Mr Justice Collins' assurance "that while he could not be completely sure, he did not believe he made the connection between his brother and Dr Patel", when he decided the case.

Unhappy with this, the families then complained to the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman. Unfortunately the ombudsman, Sir John Brigstocke, had to excuse himself because "he knows Dr Chai Patel well, in a business capacity". The families were then told that the Lord Chancellor – with whom they were already unhappy – would appoint a temporary ombudsman. Again they expressed dismay at a potential conflict of interest. Finally they learnt that Sir John Brigstocke had made an "informal agreement" with his equivalent in Northern Ireland, Karamjit Singh, and that Mr Singh had agreed to look into the matter. So that's all right then.

NHS PLC

Paying through the noose

EXTRAORDINARY arrangements for paying the 230 "contractors" at the Department of Health's Commercial Directorate – responsible for healthcare procurement and bringing the private sector into the NHS – have emerged from information released to the *Eye* under the Freedom of Information Act.

The contractors provide their services through 36 different agencies, from the obscure to well known outfits like Michael Page, Office Angels, Serco and Capita. The DoH refuses to say how much individuals are paid; but the agencies' hefty mark-ups would account for why the *average* member of staff costs £228,000.

The justification for this that the work is short term. Yet the staff are hardly temps: 133 have been there more than a year, so standard fixed-term deals used elsewhere in government would have been far cheaper. Meanwhile, only five junior staff are actually civil servants.

Many of the directorate's top brass, almost all of whom have been there more than two years, go one step further and provide their services through personal companies. For example, chief operating officer Mike Seitz (acting boss until the recent arrival of American Chan Wheeler), has a company called Mseitz Ltd; Sean Kelleher, the man in charge of all clinical procurement, acts through Osmarton Ltd; head of "commercial solutions" Peter Holt uses Peter Holt Services Ltd; and policy director Andrea Longhi earns his money through AV Longhi Ltd.

As "small companies" these firms are exempt from filing full accounts, but one of them, Kelleher's firm Osmarton, is more revealing. In 2006 it earned £255,309, of which £32,229 was paid out in expenses, leaving the balance to be taxed at just 19 percent. Instead of paying himself wages Kelleher then took £192,000 as a dividend, a well-worn trick for avoiding national insurance.

The new minister for the Commercial Directorate is Dawn Primarolo, fresh from a decade in charge of the tax system at the Treasury. One of her more vigorous campaigns there was a clampdown on the use of service companies to dodge tax and national insurance. Messrs Kelleher and co might have some explaining to do to their new boss.

PRISON ASSAULTS

Pond dries up

WHATEVER happened to "Operation Pond", a Cambridgeshire police investigation into a series of allegations of racial abuse and assaults by staff on inmates at top security Whitemoor Prison?

It was launched in October 2005 after several prisoners complained of being beaten, kicked and assaulted. Black inmates complained of being called "black bastard", "nigger" or "monkey man" – mostly in the jail's segregation unit; and Asians of being called "Paki".

In one case an inmate alleged that he had been told not to call out greetings to a friend and, when he remonstrated with officers and asked "why not?", he was grabbed, punched and kicked. The friend he had called out to also alleged that two days later he too was assaulted in his cell after he had asked for his dinner tray to be removed. Another prisoner claimed he was hit over the head with a riot shield, dragged into a cell and stripped naked.

Solicitors are handling about 13 different cases. One of them, Daniel Rubinstein, who is representing three inmates, wrote to Cambridgeshire police two months ago (after almost a year of silence from the police) to ask how the investigation was progressing.

He has heard nothing.

While the investigation seems to have stalled, complaints of violent behaviour at the jail are still reaching the Prisoners' Advice Service. Solicitor Lubia Begum-Rob said the organisation receives more complaints from Whitemoor than any other prison. This year alone she had received two serious reports of assault from inmates, one of whom had been left with a boot mark on his head. An internal inquiry has apparently found this to have been the result of legitimate control and restraint. Ms Begum-Rob intends to take the case to the Prison Service Ombudsman.

The *Eye* was told the Whitemoor investigation was still "open". Curious given that some of these case are now two years old and any allegations of racist violent behaviour would normally be dealt with days or weeks if it occurred out on the streets on a Friday night. As we went to press, a Cambridgeshire spokeswoman said she could not say whether a file on any of the cases had ever been sent to the Crown Prosecution Service as the officer in charge was out of contact. "You will have to be patient," she said.

ORGANISED CRIME

Smack in face

THE Serious Organised Crime Agency's bizarre approach to combating drug trafficking has stunned observers yet again.

Nicknamed "MI7" because of its spooky pretensions (the chairman is former MI5 boss Sir Stephen Lander), SOCA seems reluctant to dirty its hands actually nicking drug gangs. Late last month a vehicle was stopped coming off a ferry from Holland. Customs officers took the driver and passenger away for "routine" questioning while other officers found nearly 120kgs of heroin in the vehicle.

Customs contacted SOCA thinking it would be delighted at the lead: £8m worth of heroin is a major find in anyone's book. But SOCA was not interested (some say the lead was lost in its notorious bureaucracy) and did not even send an intelligence officer to follow up.

In pre-SOCA days, Customs would have let the suspects drive away and run a surveillance operation to track the heroin's delivery, thus nabbing the bosses. But in April last year, Customs was stripped of its drug investigators and funding in favour of SOCA. So all Customs could do was to arrest the couriers, allowing a potential lead to a major heroin operation to be lost.

Insiders say that HMRC's director of criminal investigations Roy Clarke stormed over to SOCA HQ to remonstrate at its policy of not taking on Customs' large drugs detections at the border. In its first year SOCA took up only a "a dozen or so" of 350 intelligence referrals on drug trafficking.

In the City

UNDETERRED at a continuing investigation by the Department of Trade & Industry into his involvement with a collapsed property company, "Lord" Edward Davenport is once again behind (but not in front of) a company claiming to own multi-million pound assets.

The property company Southern Cross Group collapsed in 2005 owing around £20m, despite claiming assets of almost £50m. Southern Cross, unconnected to the care homes group, had guaranteed commercial property leases on up to 50 City and West End properties, but then could not pay.

Davenport and Campbell

Officials from the DTI began an investigation soon after the collapse. In March 2006, accompanied by officers from Scotland Yard, they raided Davenport's six-storey mansion home (formerly the Sierra Leone High Commission) in Portland Place, London, taking away files and computers.

Davenport, 40, who estimates his wealth at over £100m, was home at the time. He denies any involvement or wrongdoing. The DTI has yet to decide whether to pass the case to the Serious Farce Office or begin proceedings against those involved with Southern Cross.

This was the second time a property company linked to Davenport had collapsed. In 2003, Capricorn Group Holdings, which specialised in serviced offices, crashed owing £48m. Southern Cross chairman Bruce Anderson was a Capricorn shareholder, as was a Davenport family trust.

Southern Cross was owned by Southern Cross Group International on the Caribbean tax haven of Nevis. Davenport denied he was a Southern Cross shareholder. But investigators believe Davenport, who was regularly seen in the Southern Cross offices, was closely involved. His business associate Alex King, was a director.

The new company linked to "Lord" Eddie (he bought the title) is Gresham Limited, whose latest accounts to September 2006 claim assets of £40m, virtually (possibly a good description) all of them owned through companies registered on Nevis, where disclosure is minimal. The companies all go back to a local trust company run by a firm of Nevis lawyers.

Seven Nevis companies are said to have generated sales of £64m and profits of more than £5m from providing film services, telecommunications, management of London pubs and restaurants, chauffeur-driven cars, concierge services and vending machines.

A company annual report for 2006 claims that Gresham has a £70m line of credit available for further deals, perhaps provided from its bankers, Bradford & Bingley and Lloyds TSB.

But despite such exciting prospects all three directors at the year-end last September have resigned, including chief executive Madush Gupta. Accountant Gupta apparently signed a non-statutory version of the September 2006 accounts on 2 January (although the year was stated to be 2006!), then promptly resigned the next day. The statutory accounts were signed six weeks later by a new director.

But auditors Charles Lovell deny signing the 2006 accounts filed at Companies House. They say they resigned as auditors last year.

There are now two new directors, one (a secretary) whose previous experience was with a short-lived cleaning company which never traded and was struck off in 2004, the other had not previously been a company director. Hardly impressive for a company with such assets and potential.

Davenport is nowhere to be seen. Gresham is owned by another Nevis company, Fortune Pond! It was said last September to be ultimately controlled by one Madeleine Anderson. She was formerly a director of the cleaning company with one of Gresham's two new directors. The previous year it was ultimately controlled by one NM Ricardo-Hall; Nathaniel Michael Ricardo-Hall handles Davenport's PR and also lives in Monaco, giving the same address as the Edward Davenport Foundation. Davenport also lives in Monaco.

In 1998, Davenport, Michael Ricardo-Hall and a woman were charged with defrauding Gleneagles Hotel of £18,000 by pretending to be aristocrats, while running up a bill for a five-day stay over the 1997 New Year festivities. They denied the charges, which were later dropped.

That was not "Lord" Eddie's first brush with the law. He was jailed for nine months for VAT evasion, on ticket sales for events, in the early Nineties but freed on appeal. His first business venture was promoting the much-publicised Gatecrasher Balls for teenage hoorays.

Gresham claims in its publicity material to have been in business since 1958, which is both true and not true. It was formed then as Industrial Design & Finance and operated modestly under that name until 2005, when it was sold. The intermediary who acquired the company was a former Southern Cross company secretary. Davenport was said to be the backer. The company name was changed to Gresham. All the Nevis-based assets have been injected since then.

Davenport's website does not mention Gresham by name, but its description of his business activities bares uncanny echoes of those to be found at Gresham. There are also a series of UK companies based at Gresham's address, now 32 Portland Place – across from Davenport's home, number 33 – whose activities mirror some of those of the Nevis companies. And perhaps not surprisingly, Davenport can be contacted via Gresham.

One of Gresham's assets is the Covent Garden Film Studio. However, the studio is owned, according to Davenport's own website, by the Monaco-based Edward Davenport Foundation. Another location available for filming is Davenport's home in Portland Place – which is owned by yet another Nevis company, helped by a mortgage from HSBC in Monaco, when a Davenport company bought the freehold for £3.75m in 2005.

Davenport and Prince Albert of Monaco

Davenport's website proudly features our hero with the ruler of the tiny tax-free principality, Prince Albert. He claims to be assisting Monaco with property deals. Among the rock and film stars, models and other celebrities featured with a smiling Fast Eddie is none other than man of the hour Alastair Campbell.

Just how much the Prince and the spin-meister know about Davenport's background is uncertain. But then, as his website states (so it must be true): "His reputation is of the utmost importance and Davenport goes to extremes to ensure he is scrupulously fair in all his dealings." Doubtless the DTI would wholeheartedly agree.

THE Conrad Black trial proved that exercising the right to silence for a senior suit is no more a get-out-of-jail card than the recent fashion for testifying. In high profile cases such as Enron, WorldCom and Tyco, the chief targets – Ken Lay, Jeff Skilling, Bernie Ebbers and Dennis Kozlowski (who did not testify at an earlier mis-trial) – all testified, hoping to explain their innocence, and were still convicted. One big exception was HealthSouth's Richard Scrushy. But he managed to orchestrate a favourable local climate that clearly influenced the jury, who acquitted him of all fraud charges despite a procession of former executives testifying against him. Second time around Scrushy was convicted on separate bribery charges.

Defence lawyers tend to argue that it is better to stay out of the witness box for fear of self-incrimination – a big risk for chief executives not used to being questioned about their behaviour. Few have the steely resolve and intellect (plus crooked father alibi) of a Kevin Maxwell.

This was no doubt why the bombastic Lord Black, despite all his public pronouncements of innocence, chose to stay silent before the jury. They were unlikely to have been persuaded – as shown by his conviction.

But staying silent proved just as unsuccessful in the Adelphi case where those defendants received long sentences. The only serious chance appears to be to discredit the prosecution's witnesses, and hope the jury dislikes them for singing to stay out of jail more than it dislikes the defendant.

This clearly worked to some extent in the Black trial, where the jury tended to disregard chief prosecution witness David Radler and convicted on the charges where his testimony was not crucial. But this is a high-risk strategy.

The fact that Radler did not win the case – curiously the jurors thought he was trying to protect Black, his long-time associate in crime – does not mean that the US tactic of using plea bargains to roll up cases by rolling over insiders is flawed. Without Radler it is probable the case against Black would never have been brought in the first place. Which is why the SFO needs the plea bargain weapon if it is ever going to achieve the kind of success enjoyed by American prosecutors.

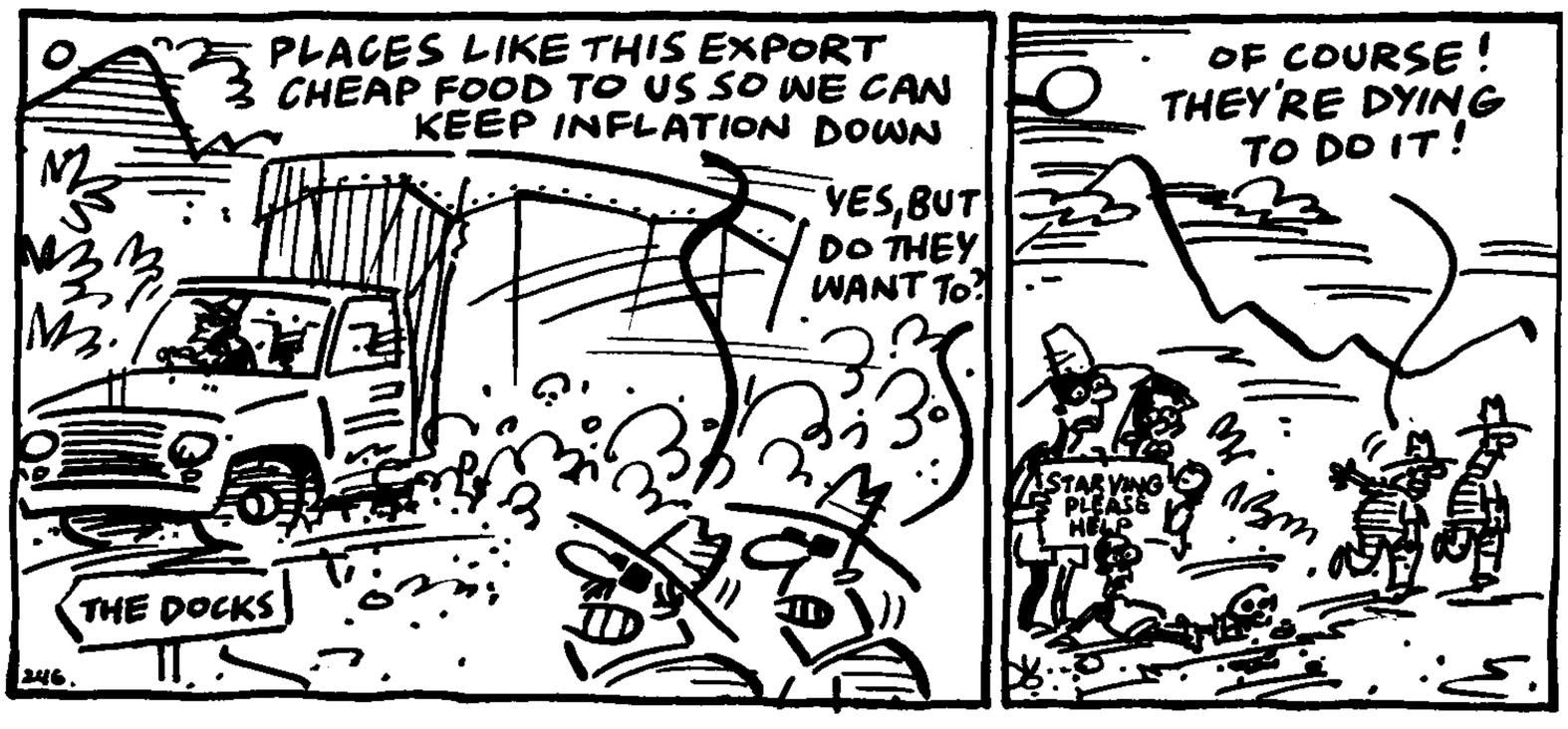
INVESTORS in Sir Chris Evans' Merlin Biosciences will be hoping that stories suggesting there won't be any "cash-for-honours" prosecutions turn out to be true. A decision is expected later this month. Crucial evidence linking Labour donor Evans to Lord Levy – with talk of a "K" or a "P" – was found in the Merlin boss's diaries, handed over by the SFO to the Scotland Yard team carrying out the honours inquiries.

This discovery is said to have galvanised the

☛ *See over...*

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG


PLACES LIKE THIS EXPORT CHEAP FOOD TO US SO WE CAN KEEP INFLATION DOWN
YES, BUT DO THEY WANT TO?
THE DOCKS
OF COURSE! THEY'RE DYING TO DO IT!
STARVING PLEASE HELP

inquiry by Yates of the Yard. The SFO is probing allegations made against Evans by a Merlin investor. Evans denies any wrongdoing.

The key problem – other than whether there is enough evidence to bring charges of selling honours or a cover-up of same – for Crown Prosecution Service senior official Carmen Dowd and Treasury counsel David Perry QC, who will decide whether there is to be a prosecution and if so for what, will be the role of the former Dear Leader at any trial.

The police interviewed Tony Blair three times, but only as a witness. The suspicion is that they "bottled" interviewing the serving Prime Minister as a suspect, even though it may be justified.

But according to lawyers with knowledge of the investigation, the CPS would have to decide whether to call Blair as a prosecution witness given that Levy and any defendant from among the Downing Street officials, such as Ruth Turner or Jonathan Powell, would all say in unison that they acted on his instructions. If they did not call Blair then Levy and the others almost certainly would. And he could undermine any prosecution case by his evidence.

Especially as Levy's defence would probably be that he was raising money for the Labour party with Blair's knowledge and approval and that any question of honours was for the Prime Minister not him. Blair would have some difficulty denying that. Similarly he would be in difficulties suggesting that everyone was off doing their own thing leaving him in blissful ignorance.

Both prosecution and defence could be in the sticky position of not wanting to call Blair and telling the other side to do so in order to be able to cross-examine him. Or to call Blair and indeed Evans even as potential hostile witnesses. Either way, a jury could be left with a clear impression that the one-time Dear Leader should be in the dock not the witness box.

Lawyers say even a limited case against Levy alone or against Levy and either Evans and/or Turner (considered possible alternatives to dropping the whole case) involving conspiracy, sale of honours or a cover-up would run similar risks – that the defendants would cry "Why me?" and point to all those who were not there and would have to be called to testify against them.

Blair could hardly relish the idea of dumping all over his faithful Lord Cashpoint, certain in the knowledge that he would be unlikely to take any fall silently. The same could be said of the Downing Street defendants. After all who was in charge of the sofa?

No wonder there are suggestions all of a sudden that there may be no prosecution. The question could be whether the CPS, advised by Perry, feels that it is better to bring a case and fail rather than bring no case at all. And there the test could be how much higher than a 50 percent chance of success the evidential bar will be placed. If nearer 75 percent then it could be argued there was insufficient evidence for anybody to be charged. Where that leaves Evans – other than hung out to dry and perhaps still with the SFO to worry about – remains to be seen.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 344

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 27 July 2007

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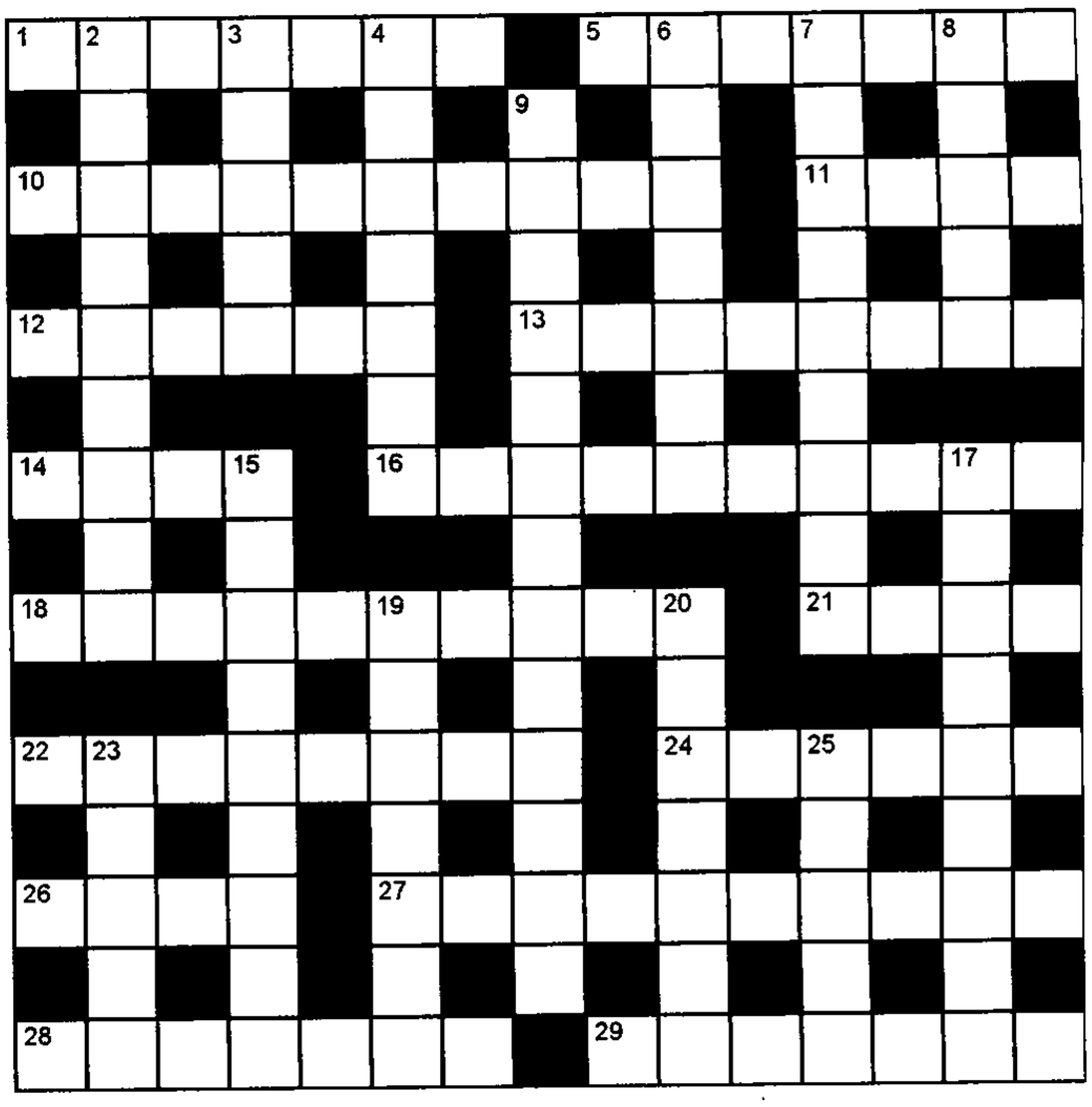


ACROSS

1 Brown's legacy? Hardly first class (7)
5 Elevate member of ruling class, as excited members will do (7)
10 "What's Brown got?" editorial by *Sun* cool (10)
11/21 Cold and unfeeling with nothing on, he has no chance (4,4)
12 Observed Conservative right brought in as test for trustworthiness (6)
13 Dog with flatulence appreciated by sailors? (4,4)
14 It's a pig keeping neutral as a newscaster (4)
16 One ever ready to gobble a Belgian? (10)
18 Queen a victim of this House (masculine aversion accepts nothing)? (10)
21 See 11ac.
22 Labour will eventually destroy this bloody area with ill-conceived Penal Act (8)
24 Sunday radio and TV shows give you terrors (6)
26 French blokes penetrating each woman (4)
27 Mad family that would have you "go down" in the street? (6,4)
28 Clinton's tag even includes being a luvvie (2,5)
29 Where to get screwing aids and plastic XP hoses (3,4)

DOWN

2 Climax of right nasty scene in Conservative party (9)
3 Say Brown's up for a jog (5)
4 Like an idiot, Menzies Campbell starts embracing alternative, rising no. 1 (7)
6 Spicy thing takes a month entering up one instance of bedroom activity (7)
7 State of Marian when Robin became stiff? (9)
8 Labour's leader has merit? Get wise! (5)
9 Stupid verbal diarrhoea a symptom of having this? (4-3-6)
15 Chips' thing caught entering Victoria Regina towards behind? (9)
17 Apparently not yourself, pissed, noticing nothing (9)
19 Employ Thatcherite technique: giving worker the sack! (7)
20 Non-appearance of sailor on scene (getting screwed) (7)
23 Origin of Lord Gnome's erection not good – disappointing thing (5)
25 Chances of Labour's last kiss blown (5)

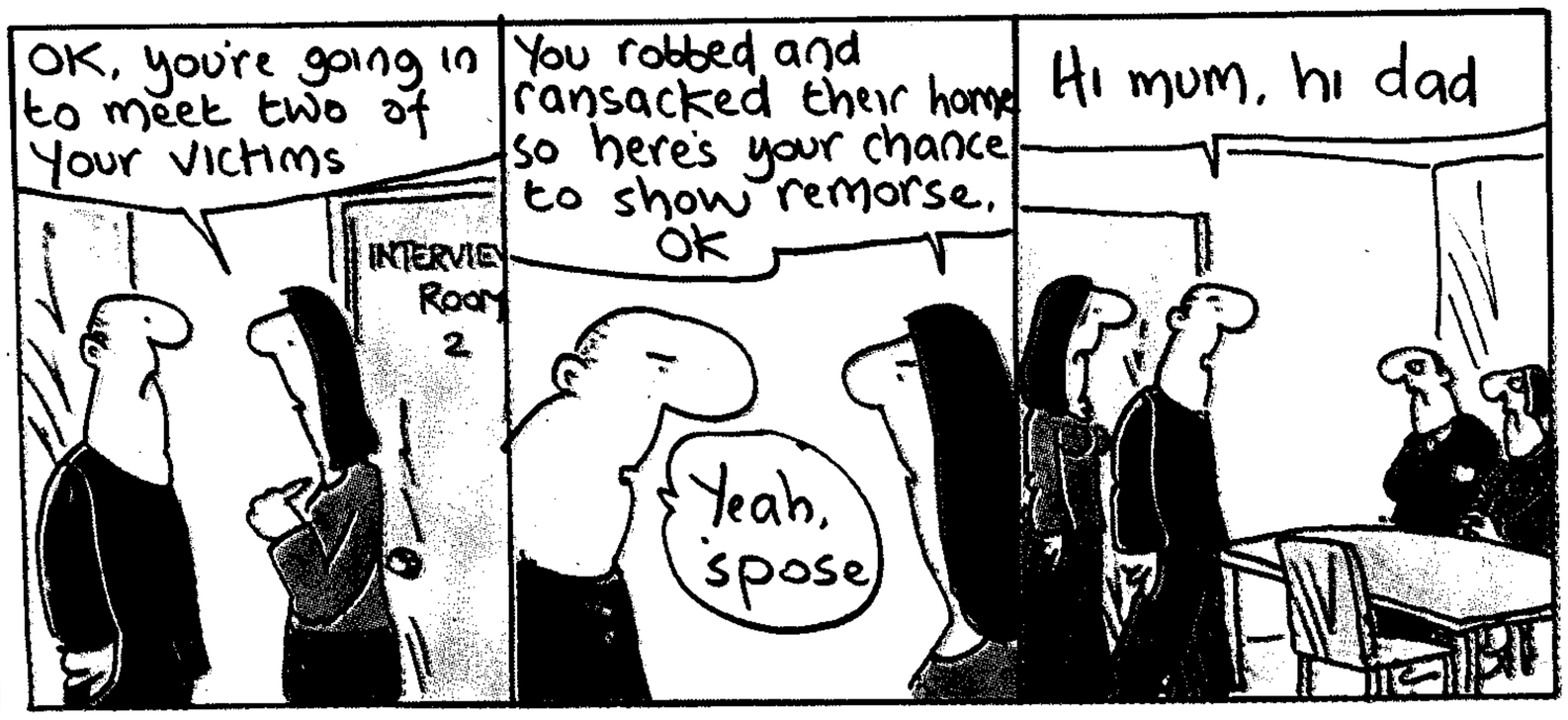
Crossword 343 winner: SUE FAIRBROTHER

ACROSS: 1 Todger 5 Tipstaff 9 Undo 10 Mollified 11 Ceremonial 12 Spew 13 Empty 15 Ugly as sin 17 Bumptious 19 Drugs 20 Star 22 Polemicist 25 Callaghan 26 Ouse 27 Deadbeat 28 Muffin.

DOWN: 2 Ounce 3 Goose-step 4 Rambo 5 Talking bullshit 6 Paisley 7 Twits 8 Fidgeting 14 Moustache 16 Struck off 18 In place 21 Ruled 23 Minim 24 Sushi.

YOBS

HUSBAND


OK, you're going in to meet two of your victims
INTERVIEW Room 2
You robbed and ransacked their home so here's your chance to show remorse, OK
Yeah, 'spose
Hi mum, hi dad

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mbination of corruption,
neptitude and piety."
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OM SAI RAM

A fitting end to the ill-fitting British suit

A suitable man to spark a men's clothing revolution

Consider this proposition. Would you rather pay the same sum for a single, off-the-peg, chain store suit cut by a computer and sold to you by a spotty boy who thinks side vents are to be found on a Lambretta scooter, or for two bespoke, custom cut, hand-stitched suits, measured and sold to you by a man for whom suits are a lifetime's passion?

The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani***, that - a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up - he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more. 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business. It's a mission.

'I love seeing customers walk in a really bad suit that cost them a fortune and walk out in one of our suits that's perfect in every way, made with a good heart in a superior fabric for a half or a quarter as much.'

The price of a Daswani shirt and suit are astonishing. We are talking from £19 (£25 including tax and duty) for a custom shirt and £129 (£169 including tax and duty) for a fully lined, made-to measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £250 (£325 including tax and duty) for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade button holes to knee lining. Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500 (£1,950 including tax and duty), costs a third less than it would on **Savile Row**.

Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It now remains to see whether the Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, will see the end of the off-the-peg British chain store suit. On price alone, it's a sartorial solution that will even please the Suits in accounts.

Business hours 10am - 8pm
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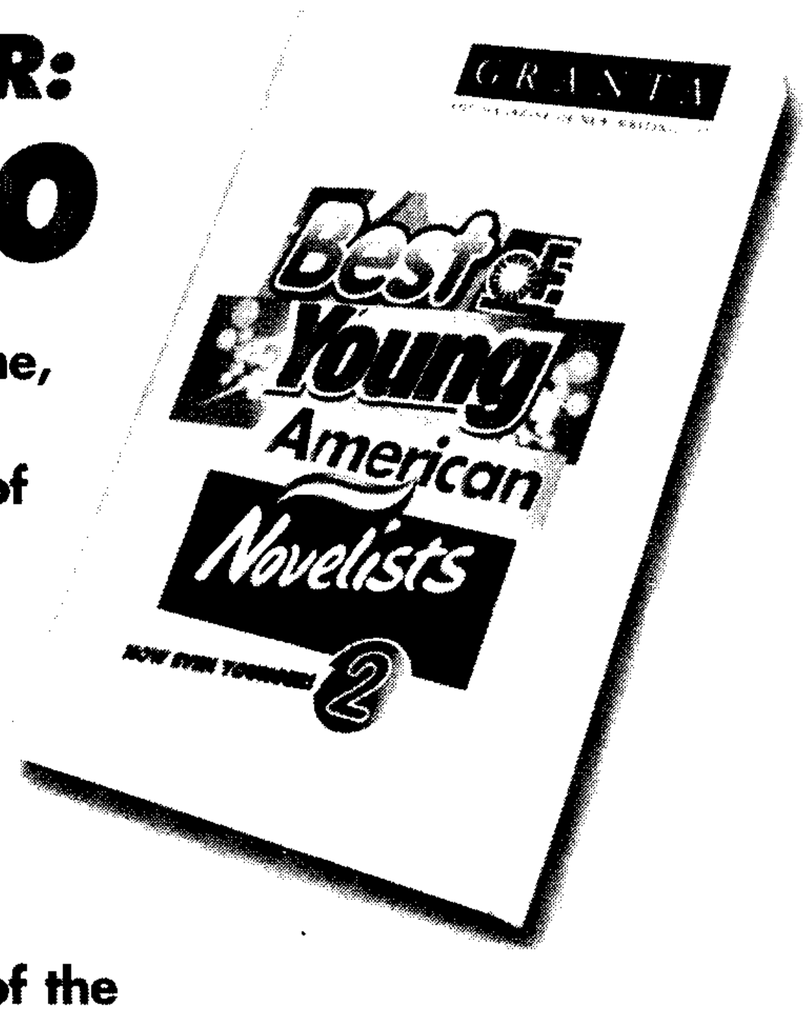

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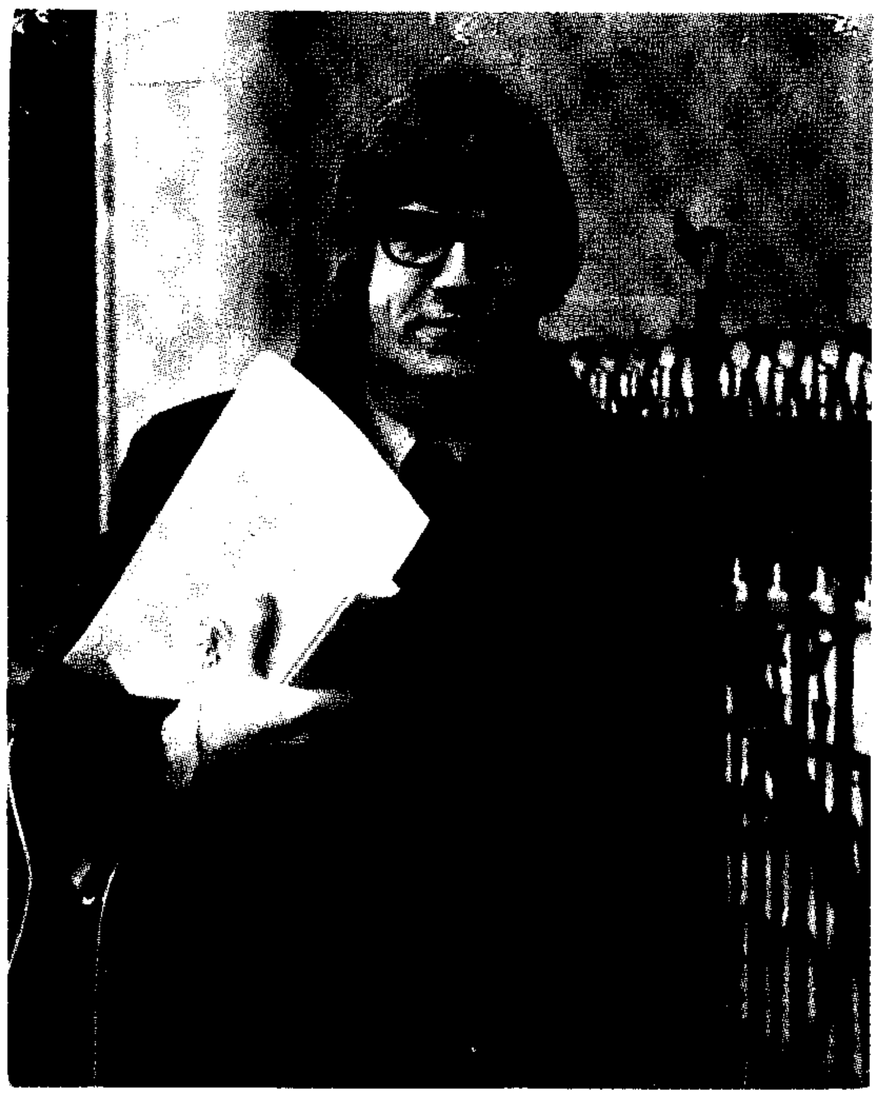

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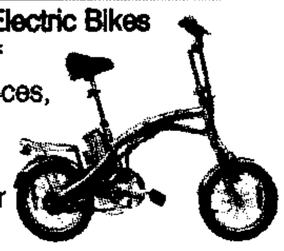

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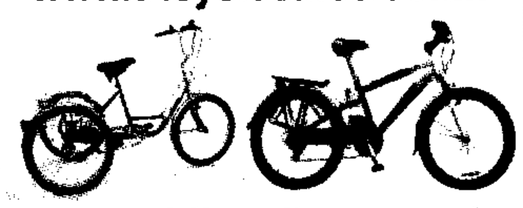

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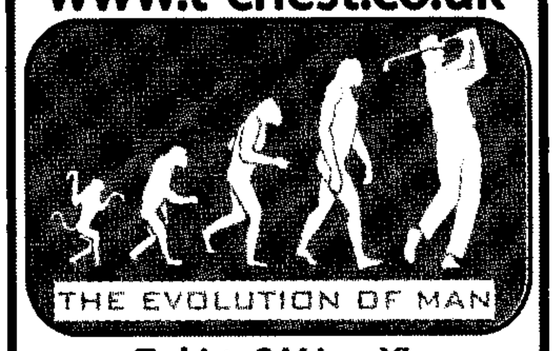

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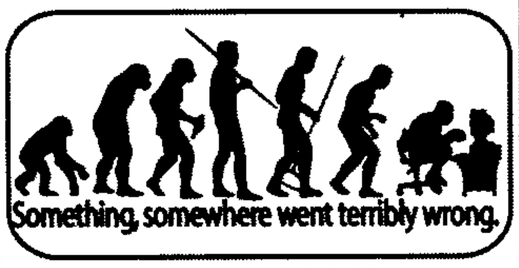

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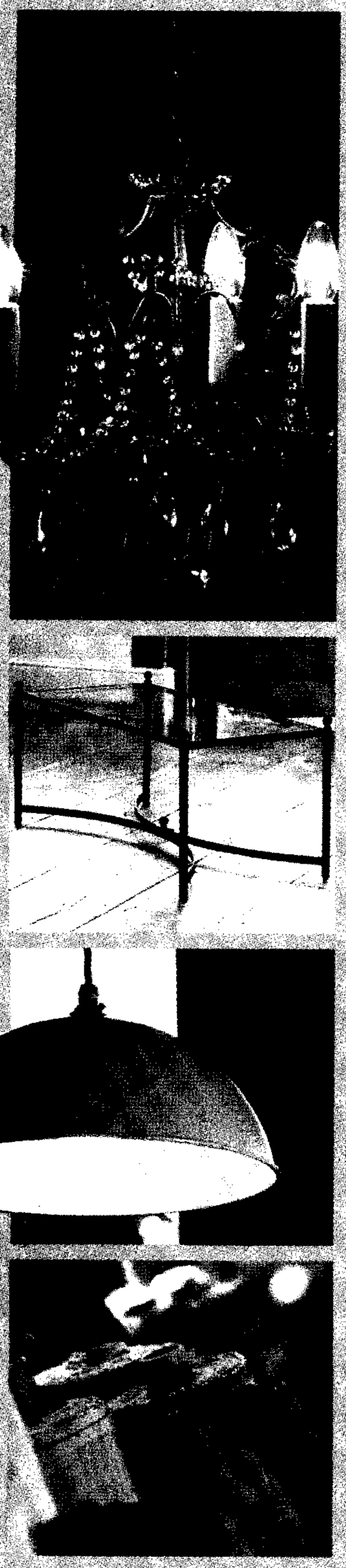
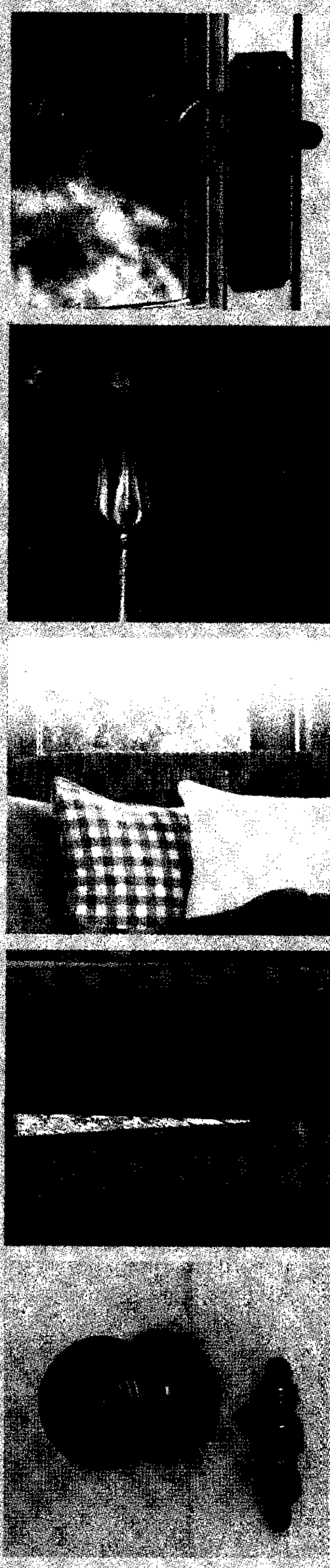

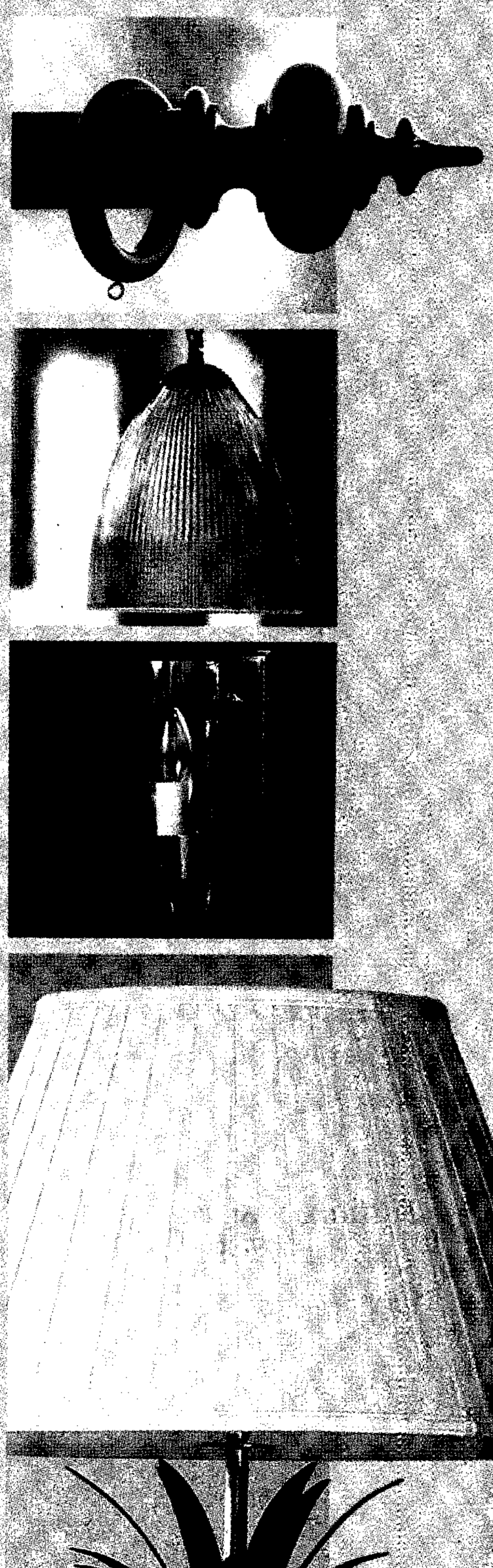

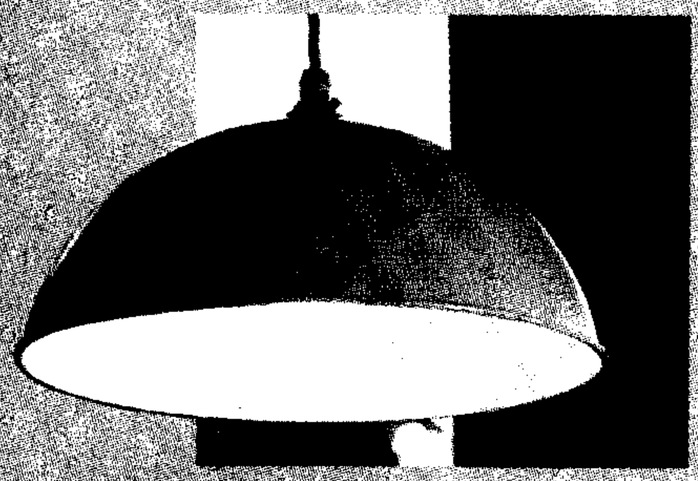

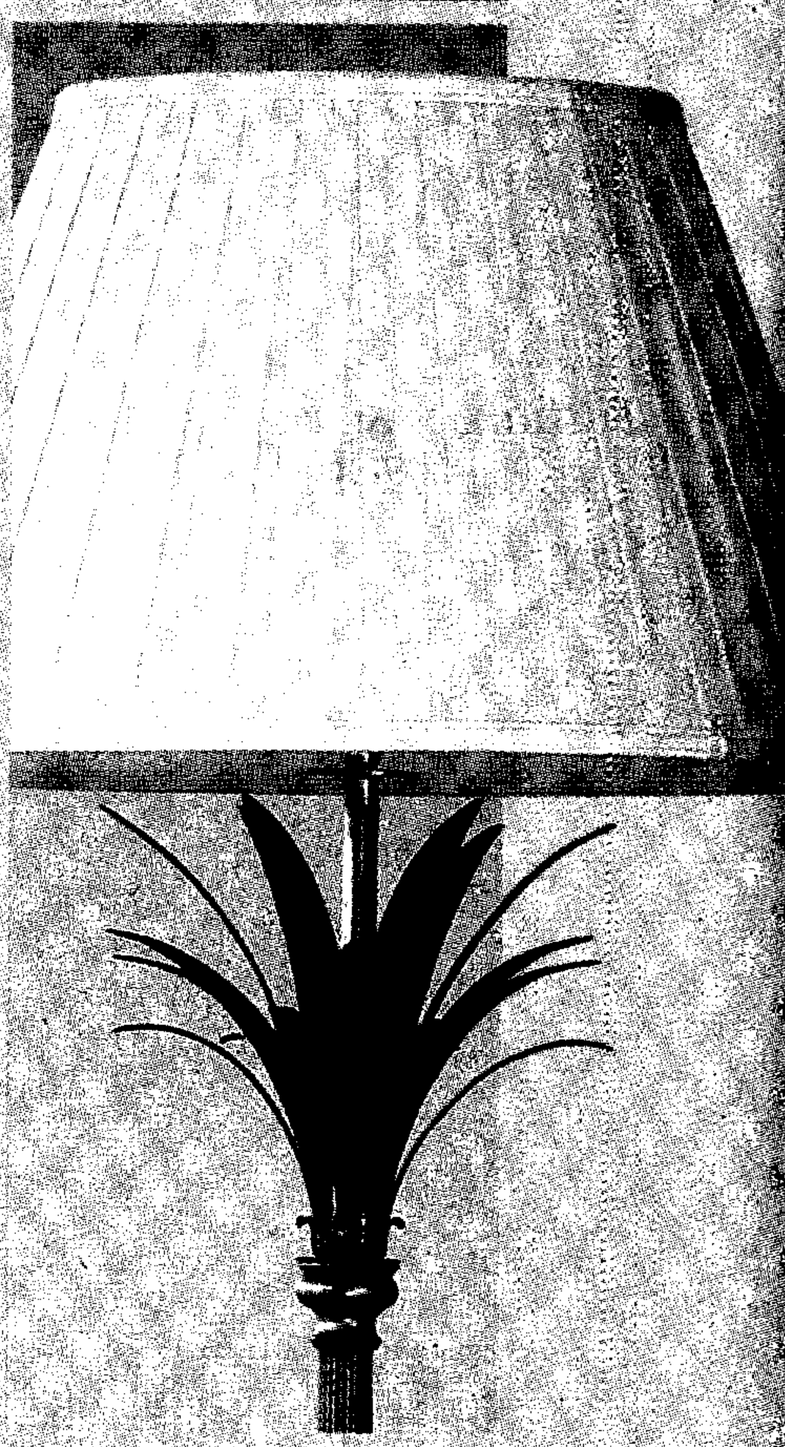

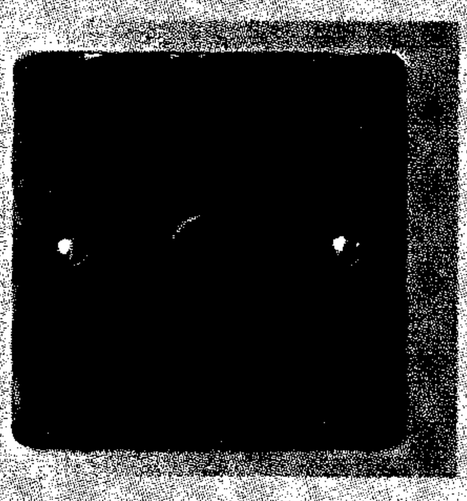
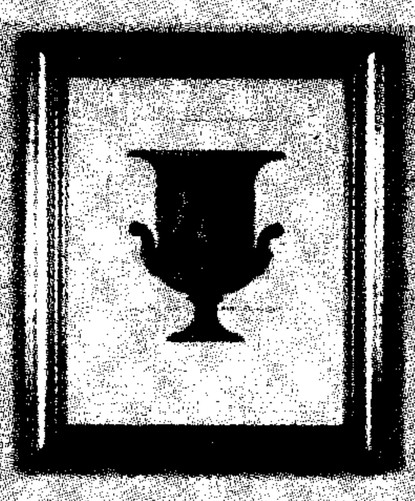
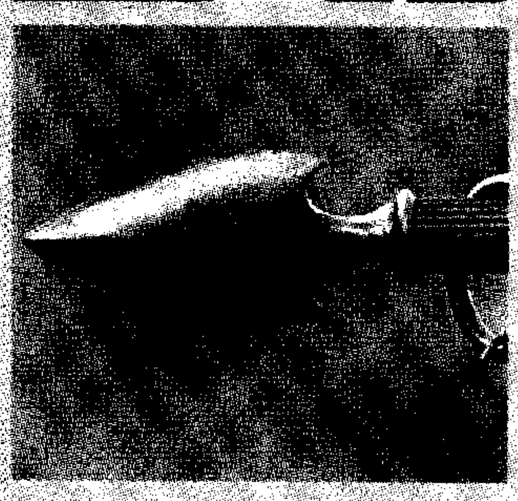

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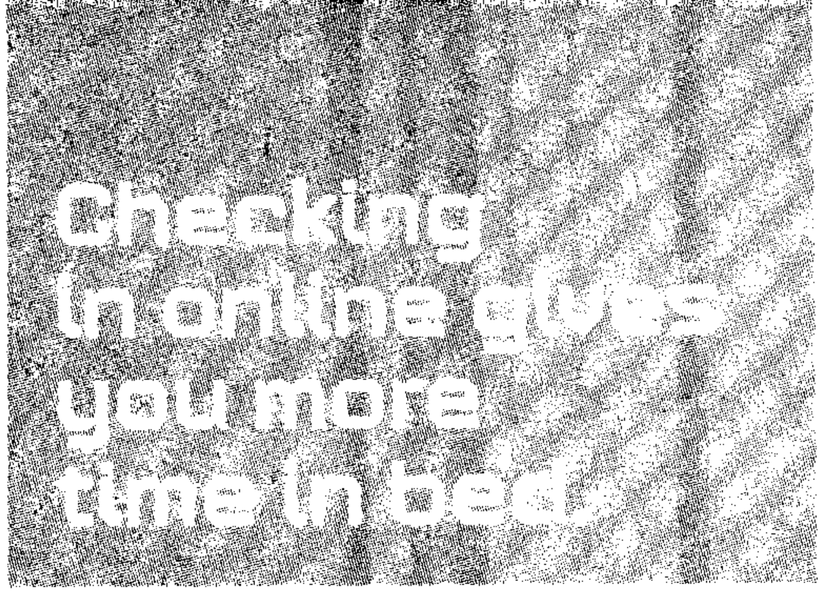

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